ANOTHER FINE KAPPA PUBLICATION

TRIBUTE TO "MACHO MAN" RANDY SAVAGE

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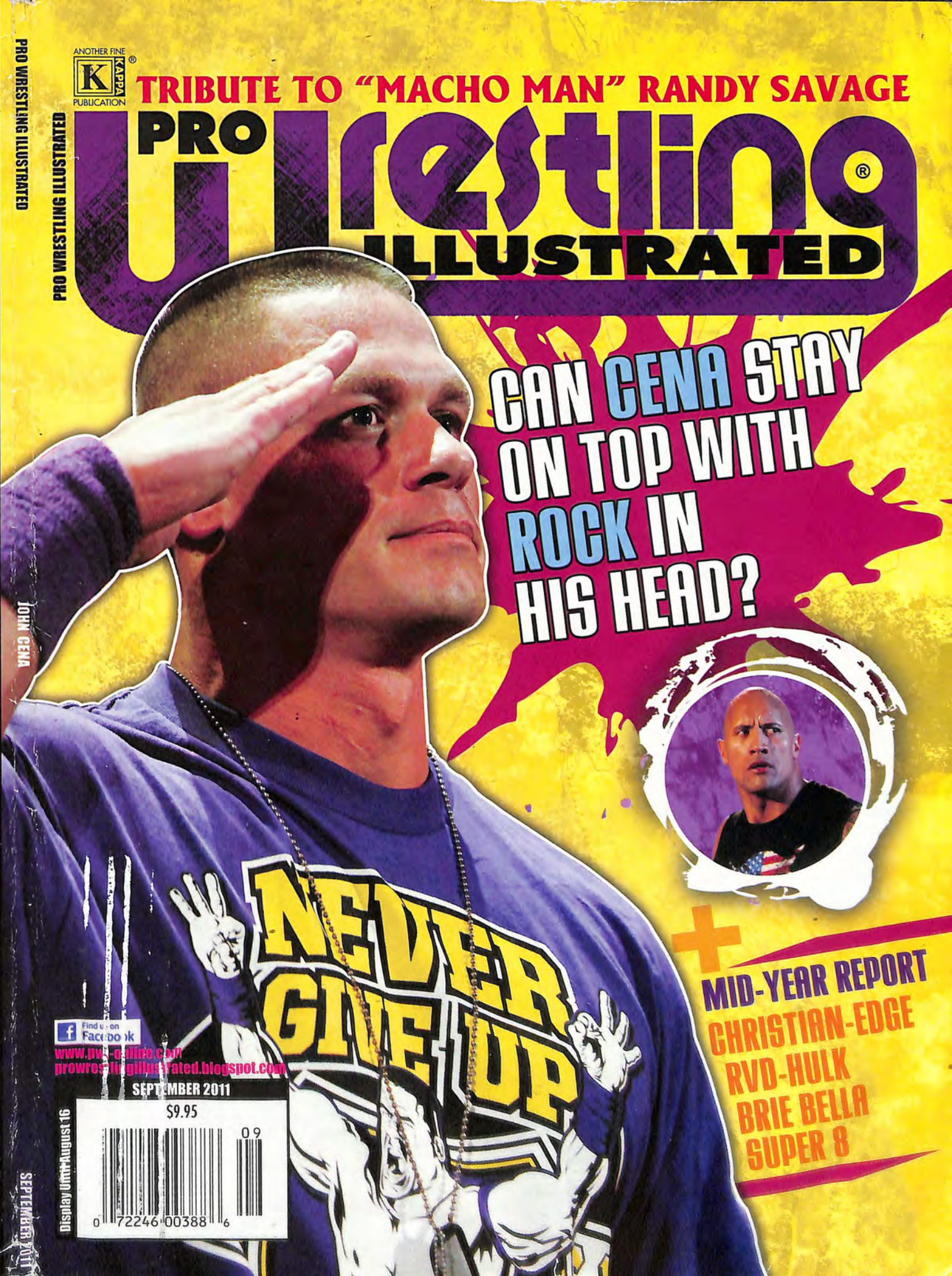

JOHN CENA

+ MID-YEAR REPORT
CHRISTIAN-EDGE
RVD-HULK
BRIE BELLA
SUPER 8

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WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

1. Airplane spin
2. Arm drag
3. Arm lock
4. Asian spike
5. Atomic drop
6. Bear hug
7. Bite
8. Body slam
9. Body tackle
10. Bulldog
11. Chicken wing
12. Choke slam
13. Claw
14. Clothesline
15. Cross body block
16. Double axehandle
17. Drop kick
18. Eagle split
19. Elbow smash
20. Eye gouge
21. Face rake
22. Fireman's carry ram
23. Flying body press
24. Flying clothesline
25. Flying drop kick
26. Flying elbow drop
27. Flying head butt
28. Flying mare
29. Forearm smash
30. Foreign object
31. Full nelson
32. Giant swing
33. Grapevine
34. Hair pull
35. Hammer lock
36. Head lock
37. Head stomp
38. Hip roll
39. Irish whip
40. Knee drop
41. Leg lock
42. Leg sweep
43. Manager interference
44. Monkey flip
45. Overhead toss
46. Pole ram
47. Reverse chin lock
48. Rolling scissors
49. Rope burn
50. Russian sickle
51. Savate kick
52. Scissors grip
53. Shoulder breaker
54. Slingshot
55. Snap mare
56. Step-over toe hold
57. Suplex
58. Surfboard
59. Turnbuckle smash
60. Wrist lock

SET-UP HOLDS

61. Abdominal stretch
62. Avalanche
63. Backbreaker
64. Backroll press
65. Belly to belly
66. Big splash
67. Boston crab
68. Brain buster
69. Camel clutch
70. Cobra clutch
71. Cradle
72. Crucifix
73. DDT
74. Figure four
75. Flying leg drop
76. Gourd buster
77. Hurricanrana
78. Moonsault
79. Neckbreaker
80. Piledriver
81. Power bomb
82. Power slam
83. Scorpion deathlock
84. Sleeper
85. Slingshot suplex
86. Spine buster
87. Stunner
88. Sunset flip
89. Superplex
90. Texas cloverleaf

YOUR NAME (PRINT NEATLY) _____

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CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE _____

WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES) _____

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: *Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

SET-UP HOLDS: *Choose 5 of the holds at the left numbered 61-90. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: *Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.*

FROM THE DESK OF...

A WONDERFUL TRIBUTE to Randy Savage was aired on *Monday Night Raw* three days after his tragic death—and Vince McMahon sat in his makeshift office at the Rose Garden Arena in Portland, Oregon, and seethed.

I despise this man. I despise this man. Why is he taking up our precious time? Oh, how I despise this man.

Nobody dared interrupt the WWE chairman's angry thoughts with a lame question like, "What do you think of the piece, Vince?" It was good, very good, in fact, but that wasn't going to change McMahon's state of mind. With the amount of mainstream media attention being given to the "Macho Man," who died at age 58 after suffering a heart attack and driving his car into a tree, how small would Vince look if he ignored the two-time WWF champion on his flagship television show? Yes, Vince okayed the tribute, but his heart was certainly not in it.

He does indeed despise Savage. And, in spite of all the glowing tributes to the man after his death near Tampa on May 20, he is not alone with that sentiment. For the most part, Savage was a good man, but the pressures of this business and the drugs he took to stay on top made him highly volatile and sometimes dangerous. Nobody speaks unkindly of the dead, unless the dead man is Osama Bin Laden. Even McMahon never went public with his feelings about Savage. He didn't need to; his actions spoke for themselves.

Foremost, Savage is not in the WWE Hall of Fame. Such slights to men who so obviously warrant membership are reserved only for those on Vince's super crap list, the likes of Bruno Sammartino and Bob Backlund. Vince knows full well that the exclusion of these men from the HOF only serves to diminish its credibility. He just doesn't care. I do. WWE is a publicly traded company, and even more importantly, it has a responsibility to the people who support it. Savage, Sammartino, and Backlund have said repeatedly that they don't care about being in Vince's Hall of Fame, but the point is that it's not *Vince's* Hall of Fame; it's yours and mine. If we feel that certain people are worthy of being honored, it shouldn't matter that Vince might detest them. McMahon may have a legitimate personal reason for his feelings toward Savage. I won't report rumors here, but suffice it to say that if the one I heard is true, I wouldn't have any respect for McMahon if he didn't feel the way he did. Still, there is only one man whose actions were so heinous that he has, for all intents and purposes, been stricken from WWE history. Randy Savage was no Chris Benoit.

By giving his approval to the 3½-minute tribute on *Raw*, Vince was being insincere at best and hypocritical at worst. Chris DeJoseph, who worked for WWE Creative from 2005-2010, tweeted: "Only in death 'Macho Man' was allowed back on WWE TV. Such a shame ... I was always told never to mention the name 'Macho Man' EVER!"

The fact that McMahon's given his blessing to a Savage DVD and for Randy to be included on the *WWE All-Stars* video game suggests that Savage's name can be used if it increases the bottom line. Who knows? When it comes time to make his choices for the Hall of Fame Class of 2012, Vince might come to the conclusion that Savage's inclusion is indeed in his own best interest. And he won't have to hear the man he despised make an acceptance speech.

Stu Saks
Publisher

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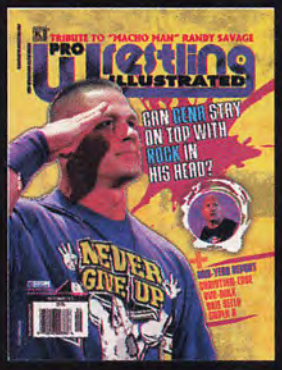

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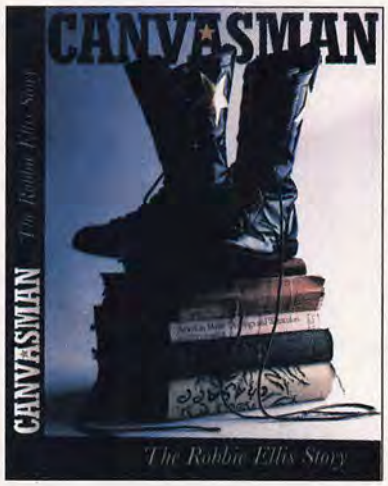
BEFORE THE BELL

COMPILED BY MIKE BESSLER

CANVASMAN: THE ROBBIE ELLIS STORY

Rob Elowitch is something of a real-life superhero. By day, he's a pleasant, unassuming art dealer who rubs elbows with the movers and shakers of Portland, Maine's, cultural elite. But from time to time, he dons a set of tights and boots to perform in a wrestling ring before an adoring public. His fans know little—if anything—of the genteel art aficionado and grandfather named Rob Elowitch; instead, they thrill to the exploits of Elowitch's alter ego, Robbie Ellis.



Canvasman: The Robbie Ellis Story is the definitive account of 68-year-old Rob Elowitch's decades-long journey through professional wrestling's independent scene. An unlikely champion of the squared circle, Rob turned down a potentially lucrative career running his father's manufacturing business, spending his youth immersed in theater, music, and art. He graduated with honors from noted liberal arts school Amherst College and married his high school girlfriend Annette. After a few years of marriage, he began covert training to become a professional wrestler. Although Rob eventually revealed his secret interest in wrestling to his wife, he effectively lived two lives for many years, trading high-quality artwork as his career while moonlighting as the pro wrestler known as Robbie Ellis.

Elowitch performed incognito as Ellis, working wrestling gigs outside of the Portland area in an effort to maintain the sanctity and credibility of his burgeoning art business. Eventually, though, the local press learned of Elowitch's secret life and ran a front-page story about his work as a pro wrestler, complete with a photo of Ellis clad in full wrestling regalia. Any embarrassment felt by Elowitch and his family soon melted away as the revelation brought accolades from far and wide. National media outlets, including *Sports Illustrated* and *The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour*, picked up the story, portraying Elowitch as a champion of ingenuity and creativity, legitimizing and uniting his longstanding loves of fine art and professional wrestling. In the years and decades since, he's followed his passion for both fields as far as possible, pushing his personal limits as a business owner, family man, and performer.

Produced and directed by Gary Robinov, *Canvasman* is a work of exceptional quality, offering a genuinely sincere and captivating glimpse into a side of the wrestling industry that is frequently overlooked and often underappreciated. Through the story of Rob Elowitch, Robinov shows wrestling as the time-honored, celebrated stuff of dreams and fantasy for devoted fans of all ages and walks of life. Indeed, *Canvasman* is the virtual antithesis of most wrestling dramas and biopics from years past, featuring a protagonist who is physically healthy, financially secure, and emotionally stable. Further—and perhaps most importantly—*Canvasman* shows that Rob Elowitch/Ellis, is a truly happy man, living each day to its fullest with the love and support of his family and friends, his colleagues, and his fans.

Wrestling fans will appreciate *Canvasman* as a historical document of one of the independent scene's most unique figures. CHIKARA co-founder Mike Quackenbush contributes to the film, sharing his assessment of Ellis' contribution to independent wrestling. In-ring action is not the primary focus of the film, but selected highlights of Ellis' grappling work are appropriately interspersed with shoot-style interviews, providing wrestling enthusiasts with a presentation that ultimately proves insightful, entertaining, and inspirational.

For its outstanding quality as both poignant documentary and heartfelt memoir, *Canvasman: The Robbie Ellis Story* earns five out of five suplexes.

For more information on this film, visit www.canvasmanmovie.com.

TALKIN' TRASH

10. Christian finally wins the World championship, only to drop the strap to Randy Orton two days later. Although he held the title for just two days, Christian's brief stint as World champion was more important historically than his 247 days as ECW champion.

9. After an unceremonious release from TNA, Jay Lethal returns to Ring of Honor. When asked what Lethal's departure means to the future of the X division, Hulk Hogan replied, "What the hell is an X division, dude?"

8. Michelle McCool retires from WWE, reportedly looking to spend some quality time with her husband, The Undertaker. It's truly a special kind of relationship when the couple's "quality time" consists of activities like motorcycle riding, watching MMA fights, and heckling Brock Lesnar. Live it up, lovebirds!

Photo by Duane Long

7. The Sheik defeats Colt Cabana for the NWA heavyweight championship. With NWA mainstay Adam Pearce sidelined due to a neck injury, the NWA is making good use of a diversely entertaining pool of talent.

6. Kharma makes her explosive debut in WWE, decimating the Divas division in a devastating series of ambushes and one-sided beatings. If she keeps up the good work, WWE may promote her from in-ring talent to a spot as the next valet/girlfriend for Italian Stallion Santino Marella.

5. Hulk Hogan teases a return to in-ring action, speculating that he may be ready to wrestle by late-2011. On Wall Street, trading of artificial hip futures rose 15 percent on the news of Hulk's statements.

4. TNA re-brands its weekly show as *Impact Wrestling*. Any chance they could "re-brand" Eric Bischoff while they're at it?

3. CM Punk considers leaving WWE due to unresolved issues regarding the renewal of his contract. Punk may be happier as a star of the indy scene instead of languishing in the WWE mid-card, but it would be a shame to miss an opportunity for an epic feud between Punk and Daniel Bryan while they're both still signed to the "E."

2. Chyna comes back to the business at TNA's Sacrifice pay-per-view as Kurt Angle's "mistress." Wow! Just imagine how volatile that relationship would be if it were based in real-life!

1. "Rated R Superstar" Edge retires from wrestling due to a serious medical condition. After a tremendous career as one of wrestling's most entertaining performers, we're fortunate to see Edge step aside gracefully while retaining the hard-earned respect and admiration of fans worldwide.

WE HEARD THAT!

"I think one of the keys to trying to stay relevant in the industry is kind of re-inventing yourself so you can take elements of your real personality, but it's dialed way up. I don't walk around pulling my own hair out and eyes bugging out when I'm on the street."

—Edge on his sustained appeal as a performer, from an interview with CraveOnline

"Dixie Carter owns the company. Her family put their life and blood into this thing, and I'm the 'Johnny Come Lately' who's trying to help them. They have given me an upper hand creatively to help with the direction. We're trying to make wrestling not the way it used to be; we're trying to make wrestling like it should be."

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

—Hulk Hogan on radio show *Monday Night Mayhem*, commenting on his work with TNA

"Some fans might be a little skeptical or gun-shy to come on board. But I think if we put our product out there and show fans what we can do, we'll have people jumping on board day after day after day. Once they realize what's going on in Ring of Honor, people aren't going to want to stop seeing the way we do it."

—Ring of Honor champ Eddie Edwards, discussing the current state of ROH with worldwrestlinginsanity.com

"It's funny, I never thought I would see this point where I need to be careful and work around old injuries that give me trouble every now and then. We're not supermen or wonder women anymore, like we thought we were. We try, though."

—Cheerleader Melissa Anderson, reflecting on age and experience in a conversation with Greg Oliver of SLAM! Wrestling

"What's my definition of wrestling? Simple ... Pro wrestling is an entertaining SPORT."

—Matt Morgan, via his official Twitter page

REJECTED FINISHERS

Whether it's a devastating flurry of fisticuffs or a high-flying splash, nothing caps off a great match like a jaw-dropping finisher. But the most anticipated moment of the match might fall flat if a grappler can't come up with a match-ender that seals the deal. Here are a few finishing moves that we'll never see in the ring ... if we're lucky, that is.

The High Cole-onic: Named for WWE's most prolific smack-talker Michael Cole, this move involves a well-timed kick to the large intestine, causing one's opponent to suffer an instantaneous attack of explosive diarrhea.

The Appendix Punch: Legend holds that this move was the precursor to Ox Baker's infamous heart punch. Baker reportedly scrapped the move when he realized that it would not work on an opponent who had his appendix removed. For similar reasons, the gallbladder punch and tonsil punch saw little use in the ring.

The Fabergé Egg Smash: Used exclusively by little-known indy wrestler Rasputin Alexandrovich, the mad Russian won his matches by smashing a genuine, jewel-encrusted Fabergé egg into the foreheads of his opponents. Unfortunately, each and every time Alexandrovich busted up one of these rare antiques, he'd simultaneously bankrupt the match's promoter, singlehandedly closing down almost a dozen organizations before his devastatingly expensive finisher was banned in 1983.

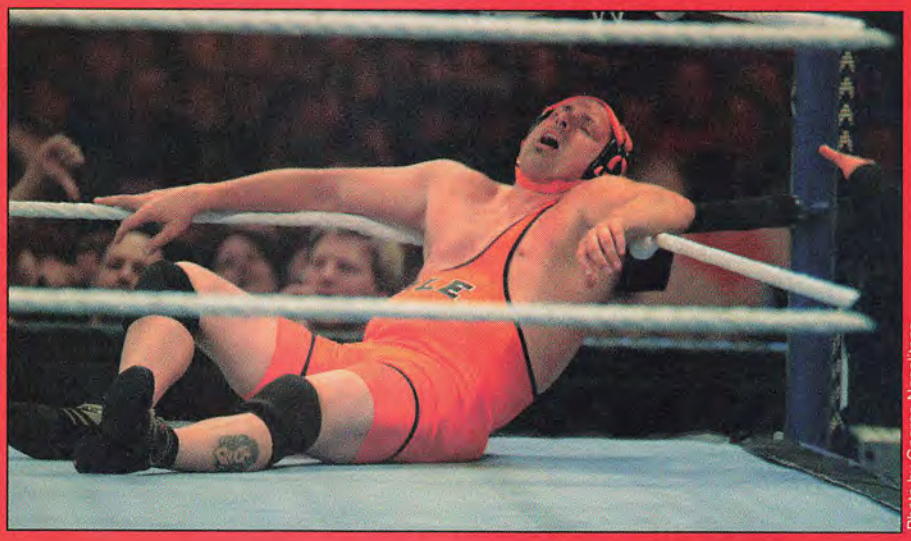


Photo by George Napolitano

FIGHTING FARE: REPLICA BELTS

There was a time when the closest that a wrestling fan could get to having his own big-time championship title belt was to glue some painted blocks of wood onto an old leather bodybuilding belt. But fans of professional wrestling's Golden Age are adults now, and with a burgeoning market for nostalgia and collectibles, there's sustained demand for realistic replicas of championship gold.

Both WWE and TNA offer official replicas of their championship belts, ranging from painted plastic playthings to deluxe reproductions made of leather, metal, and imitation jewels. Of course, these replicas aren't of the same quality and composition of the official title straps fashioned by noted craftsmen like Dave Millican and Reggie Parks, but some of the most ornate reproductions

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certainly merit a second look when carried on the shoulders of proud and devoted fans as they attend wrestling-themed events.

Replica belts don't just command the attention and admiration of fellow fans; they also garner some heavyweight prices on the open market. While Mattel's newest line of toy WWE belts start at around $15 to $20, collector-grade reproductions of belts such as the WWE championship and the TNA World title strap generally fetch between $300 and $600. Vintage belts, such as the AWA World heavyweight and the NWA World heavyweight are also available and remain very popular among older wrestling fans.

Independent federations frequently make use of replica belts for their own events, as these reproductions are an impressive prize for their main attractions. But when a reproduction just won't do, unique yet affordable belts are available through a growing community of internet-based entrepreneurs who offer handmade, custom championship belts at relatively reasonable prices.

For the most discriminating of collectors, online auctions are an ideal place to land wrestling collectibles, including autographed reproduction titles as well as handcrafted, ring-worn championship belts. Old belts from defunct promotions are highly collectible and often sell for thousands of dollars.

CAPTION ME!

Think you're a better writer than the editors at *PWI?* Here's your chance to prove it, punk! This shot of The Rock celebrating his birthday with two young fans on *Raw* deserves a concise, and downright uproarious caption. If you think you are up to the challenge, e-mail your zany quips to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com, or slap a stamp on an envelope and snail-mail it to "Caption Me!," Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. In the next issue, we'll share with you the best of the bunch—and the funnier the better!

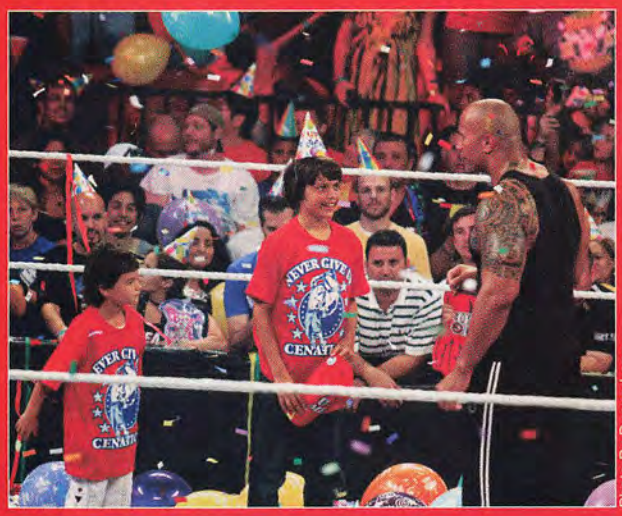


Photo By Duane Long

AUGUST'S BEST

Channeling the skills he developed playing Operation as a child, Samoa Joe deftly removes D'Angelo Dinero's Adam's apple without getting buzzed.
—humdinger1@verizon.net

Joe was outraged that Dinero didn't serve a vegetarian option at his luau.
—Jack Fliece, Minneapolis, MN

An apple a day might keep the doctor away, but apparently it invites an attack from Joe.
—fBomber_213@aol.com

Adding insult to injury, Samoa Joe steals "The Pope's" apple after sending him through a table.
—Jeff Tuck, Lititz, PA

Guess "The Pope" isn't the apple of Samoa Joe's eye.
—Marissa Ogdale, Chicago, IL

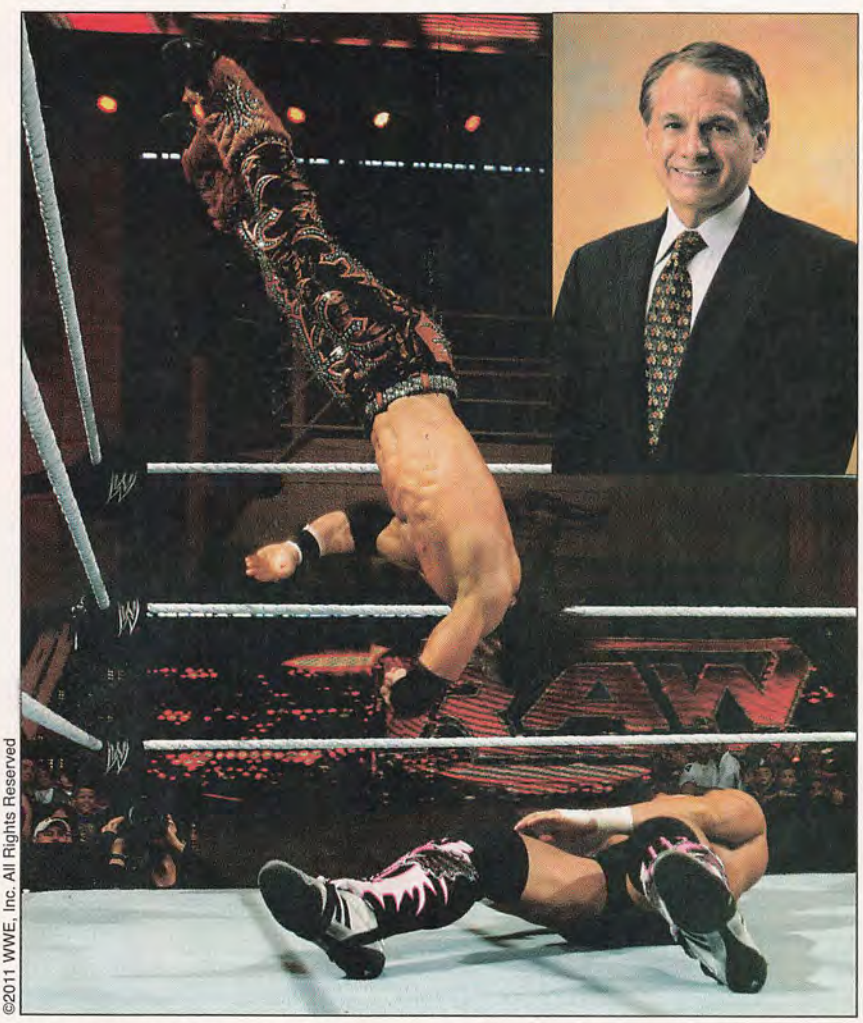
Photo By Duane Long

RINGSIDE

WITH BILL MELTZER

THE SUDDEN RETIREMENT of **Adam "Edge" Copeland** due to spinal stenosis has had a ripple effect on the rest of WWE in the weeks and months that have followed his announcement. Apart from Edge vacating the WWE World championship—which has subsequently changed hands twice, with **Randy Orton** ending **Christian's** first World title reign after just two days—WWE has been shuffling personnel between Raw and Smackdown in an effort to rebalance its roster.

WWE reportedly hoped to have **John Morrison** switch brands and elevate him into Edge's position as a World title-worthy headliner on Smackdown. However, Morrison's recent neck surgery derailed that plan. Unlike the neck surgery that Edge had undergone in the past, the expected recovery time for Morrison's neck injury is generally closer to six weeks than many months. However, every patient's recovery is different and WWE has pledged caution with Morrison's injury. Neurosurgeon **Dr. Joseph Maroon** removed a bone spur and a small fragment of the C5-C6 disc from around the nerve root. In a statement, Morrison said that he noticed immediate improvement in strength and decreased numbness in his arm. He also tweeted a thank you for the well wishes.



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With the risks John Morrison takes in the ring, he should probably be thankful that he didn't suffer an even more serious neck injury than the one that recently required the surgical skills of Dr. Joseph Maroon (inset).

In his most recent public statement on his career direction after completing his WWE contract and appearing as a celebrity contestant on *Dancing With The Stars*, **Chris Jericho** said he has no timetable to return to wrestling. However, with his rock band Fozzy touring throughout 2011, Jericho said that he does not anticipate negotiating a WWE return in the immediate future. "It's not like I said I'm never coming back, but I also never put a date on it," Jericho said during a promotional blitz for Fozzy's summer tour of the U.S. and Canada. "People, I think, sometimes feel a little entitled, that it's like, 'Well, Jericho said he's coming back or Jericho should be coming back by now.' To me, it's all about expanding myself as a performer and continuing to challenge myself doing many things I find interesting to do."

Edge's retirement, Jericho's hiatus, and Morrison's absence from the ring have fueled rampant speculation that WWE will make an all-out effort to re-sign **Batista**. During his time away from wrestling, the six-time world champion has been dabbling in an action-movie career (he accepted several roles in Filipino productions) and training for a career in mixed martial arts. However, a prospective MMA con-

tract with Strikeforce recently fell through when the promotion was bought out by Zuffa Inc., UFC's parent company.

Contrary to some reports, TNA Wrestling will not be changing its company name to Impact Wrestling—at least not right away. For now, the name change affects only the company's flagship television program. The TNA initials will still be used in company branding. The addition of the "Wrestling" name to the *Impact* program is a direct attempt to differentiate TNA's image from that of WWE, which now goes only by its initials rather than World Wrestling Entertainment. In conjunction with the programming name change, TNA has adopted the slogan, "Wrestling matters here."

Triple-H conceded to *Sun (U.K.)* that his days as a full-time in-ring competitor are probably over for good because of his chronic injury concerns. Although he said he was satisfied with his performance at WrestleMania 27, Triple-H said that he did not feel his body would hold up to the strain of a regular schedule of matches. He will continue to take part in on-air storylines and compete in WrestleMania and perhaps SummerSlam, but will mostly confine himself to his new role of heading the Talent Development division of WWE.

Photo byAdam Larkey/ABC

Chris Jericho (posing with *Dancing With The Stars* partner Cheryl Burke) is constantly in search of new horizons and says he does not have a timetable for a return to WWE.

In a related story, WWE has recently been testing out the idea of hiring **Sean Waltman** as a full-time scout and talent evaluator. In a radio interview with *Right After Wrestling's* **Arda Ocal**, Waltman said that he had recently accompanied Triple-H and **The Undertaker** on a trip to Florida to watch and critique the performers in WWE's Florida Championship Wrestling developmental territory. Waltman has been doing part-time trainer work with FCW hopefuls since last year. If Waltman is brought back by WWE on a full-time basis, he will work directly under Triple-H. Most of the former DeGeneration-X member's job responsibilities would take place behind the scenes. However, he also might make some in-ring appearances in FCW and on WWE dark matches, for the purpose of evaluating prospective call-up candidates for management. In the past, similar roles were performed by **Dave Finley**, **Bob "Hardcore" Holly**, **Al Snow**, and **Steve Lombardi**.

Despite the undeniable physical risk of attempting an in-ring comeback after eight back surgeries and several major knee surgeries, 57-year-old **Hulk Hogan** has said that he hopes to challenge or tag team with or against 52-year-old **Sting** in the main event of TNA's Bound for Glory pay-per-view event in the fall. In an interview with Live Audio Wrestling, Hogan said that he believes he can limit the risk to his back and bad knees by staying away from power

Photo by Vern Verna

Sean Waltman is being considered for a position in WWE as a talent scout in Triple-H's revamped Talent Development department. HHH, meanwhile, has indicated that his career as a full-time competitor has come to an end.

moves and focusing on upper body attacks and brawling.

Hogan conceded that his plan "probably has a lot to do with ego" and that the most practical decision would be to permanently refrain from wrestling again. In the same interview, Hogan claimed that the Spike cable channel still needs to do more to raise its own level of national visibility and called on the network to more actively market the TNA product as part of its sales pitch to hotel chains and cable programming distributors.

In a lengthy interview with Canada's Slam! Wrestling, **Jeff Jarrett** spoke out about his controversial feud with **Kurt Angle**, TNA's working agreement with Mexican lucha libre promotion AAA, and the decision to hire **Joanie "Chyna" Laurer**. According to Jarrett, he and Angle have no problem working together in the ring, despite their personal differences stemming from Jarrett's marriage to Angle's ex-wife, **Karen**. Jarrett likened their feud to the storied basketball rivalry between **Larry Bird** and **Magic Johnson**, saying that he and Angle bring out the best in each

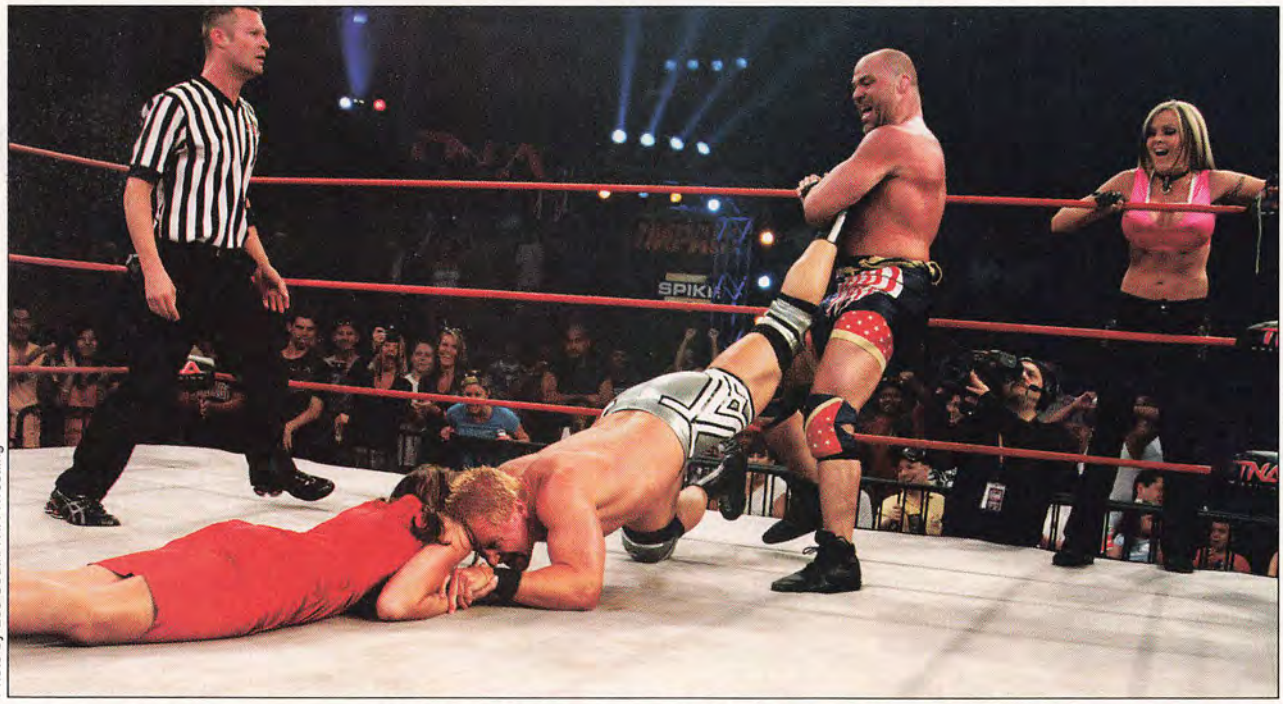

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Kurt Angle applies an anklelock on Jeff Jarrett—and there's little Karen can do to change the situation. Velvet Sky, meanwhile, seems to be enjoying the Jarretts' predicament.

other in the ring and have an underlying professional respect.

Regarding Laurer, Jarrett insisted that TNA had done "due diligence" in making sure that the oft-troubled former WWE standout was on the straight and narrow after many stints in rehab for personal problems and substance abuse. Jarrett refrained from publicly responding to disparaging personal comments recently made about him by **Konnan** *(see "International Report," page 110)*. The TNA co-founder said that he sees only positive outcomes stemming from his direct participation in a TNA-related storyline airing on AAA's programming in Mexico.

Angle, who did not miss any time after experiencing a minor neck stinger earlier this year, said that he feels sharp in the ring and reasonably healthy compared to other junctures of his career. He recently tweeted that he sees no physical obstacles that would prevent him from continuing his feud with Jarrett for as long as necessary.

Shane Helms will be on the shelf for a lengthy period of time, according to a recent Internet posting by longtime friend **Matt Hardy**. Helms and his girlfriend, **Karen Blalock Motley**, a passenger on the bike, were recently involved in a motorcycle accident that left him with a severely broken leg. He also suffered a broken ankle, fractured jaw, and broken nose during the accident, and required over 200 stitches. Helms is slated to undergo leg surgery to repair injuries that have been likened to the severity of those that essentially ended the career of **Sid Vicious** after an in-ring accident in 2001. Motley reportedly suffered a broken neck, but no spinal cord damage.

The wrestling world is mourning the recent deaths of wrestler/manager **Larry Sweeney**, Canadian independent wrestler **Frank Morin**, and longtime referees **Robert "Dusty" Feldbaumer** and **Pierre Morrison**. Our sincere condolences go out to their families and friends.

The 30-year-old Sweeney, who suffered from a severe form of bipolar disorder, hanged himself in an apparent suicide on April 11 at a wrestling school in Lake Charles, Louisiana *(See "Top 50 Stories," page 60)*. Morin, 23, wrestled under a variety of monikers—most notably as **Bash Bison**—from 2004 to 2010. He passed away in April after losing a battle with an aggressive form of cancer.

Feldbaumer, 89, died on May 1 as a result of heart disease. Best known for a lengthy stint as a WWWF referee, Feldbaumer primarily worked from the late-1960s to late-1980s. Morrison, 52, succumbed on April 1 to a heart attack. After getting his start as an active wrestler, Morrison worked as a referee for over two decades. He considered his biggest career highlight to be refereeing a match in Quebec between longtime friend **Jacques Rougeau** and Hulk Hogan. □

Larry Sweeney (pictured against Slick McCoy in 2005) was a pretty fair wrestler, but his true gift was as a quick-witted, sharp-tongued manager. Sweeney recently took his own life at age 30.

QUICK COUNT

BY AL CASTLE

STANDING IDLY IN the outfield waiting for a ball to be hit to them may be enough to earn Major League ball players the moniker "The Boys Of Summer," but pro wrestlers may have a better claim to that title, as well as that of "The Boys Of Winter, Spring, And Autumn."

After all, compared to the never-ending touring schedule of WWE, a 162-game season starts to look pretty easy. And I don't have to tell you who gets the better benefits.

Now batting! This baseball-themed edition of "Quick Count."

THE ROYALS

Following pro wrestling can change the way you view the rest of the world. Take, for instance, the recent royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton.

As the rest of the world waited for William to kiss his new princess atop the balcony of Buckingham Palace, I couldn't help but wonder how the elegant nuptials might have gone if they took place in the world of WWE.

Might Roddy Piper have walked down the aisle of Westminster Abbey in the middle of the vows to proclaim that the bride and groom both "stink"? Might The Archbishop of Canterbury unmask to reveal that he is actually Eric Bischoff? Would Triple-H have dropped a bombshell by airing a video of he and an unconscious Princess Kate getting hitched at a drive-through chapel in Las Vegas? One thing is for sure. Jake "The Snake" Roberts would most certainly not have made the royal family's guest list. He gives the worst wedding gifts.

THE GIANTS

There used to be a time when measuring nearly 7-feet tall was all you needed to have a big wrestling career. But in recent years, the way giants are perceived in wrestling has changed in a big way.

Whether it was Andre the Giant, or Jorge Gonzalez, wrestling's most towering figures were once highly sought after to sell tickets, even if they had two enormous left feet in the ring.

Today, passing the 7-foot mark can be a mixed blessing. For all his talent and athleticism, some fans hold it against Matt Morgan that he is, inevitably, a step slower than most of his colleagues. The Great Khali, once looked at as world championship material, has been relegated to kissing obese women and dressing like the tooth fairy.

Being able to easily step over the top rope shouldn't necessarily be a ticket to success in the sport. But it shouldn't create a glass ceiling either.

THE BRAVES

From Ric Flair to Steve Austin to Shawn Michaels, every wrestler who ever delivered a world-class performance inside a wrestling ring has also once embarrassed himself inside of it. Fortunately, most get to experience their rook-

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Matt Morgan delivers his Carbon Footprint big boot finisher to Mr. Anderson. Al Castle writes that while standing over 7 feet tall used to be an advantage for wrestlers, it can be more of a millstone these days.

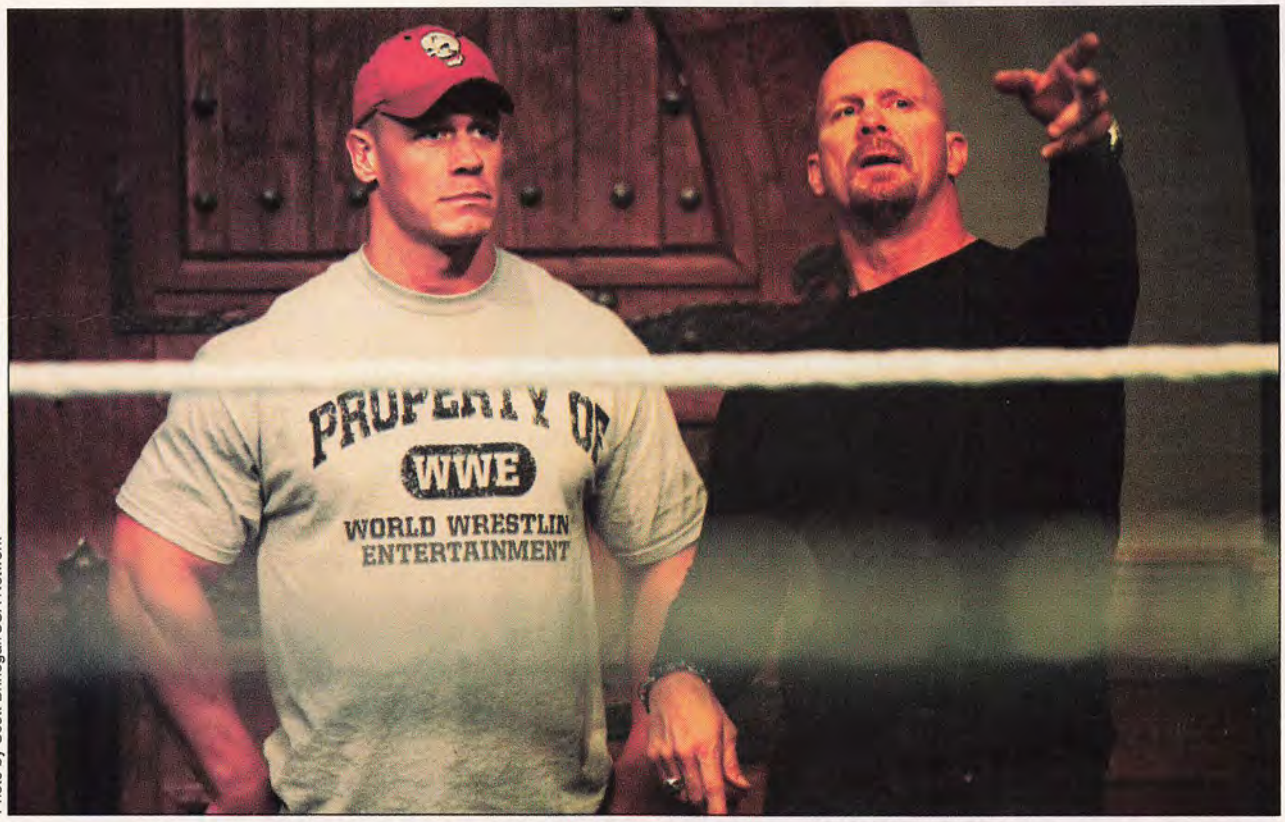

Photo by Scott Brinegar/USA Network

John Cena and Steve Austin assess the progress of *Tough Enough* contestants. For all that can be gained by competing on this reality show, Castle also points out that the youngsters run the risk of embarrassing themselves on national TV.

ie wrestling growing pains in front of sparse live crowds, and not national television audiences.

That's not the case with the men and women who participated in the most recent season of WWE's *Tough Enough* reality show.

To be sure, it took a lot of courage on the part of the contestants to withstand the grueling training regimen they were subjected to by trainers Bill DeMott, Trish Stratus, Booker T, and Steve Austin. But the part of the competition that may require the most guts from the contestants is allowing themselves to look weak, vulnerable, and clueless in front of the very fans they are hoping will one day pay to see them. The stench of "reality show contestant" does not wash off easily. Just ask The Miz.

THE TWINS

They say that twins have a closer bond than most siblings. They feel each other's pain, and relish in each other's joy. But what happens when one twin gets ahead of the other on the very same career path?

Wrestling fans may be witnessing such a scenario play out in WWE, where Brie Bella has enjoyed a fairly lengthy reign as Divas champion, while her identical twin sister Nikki has watched from ringside.

It may be easy to dismiss Brie's title win as insignificant, and assume that it could just as easily be Nikki wearing the championship. But, regardless of how the two sisters match up otherwise, holding the championship undoubtedly gives Brie a leg up on her sister. She's getting more ring time, more camera time, and learning what it's like to wear an important wrestling championship.

Nikki's recent WWE experience may be similar to her twin sister's, but there's no way it's identical.

THE PIRATES

In the August 2011 issue of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED, I wrote a feature story about the plague of Internet pirates who illegally stream wrestling pay-per-views online, and about the negative impact of the bootleggers on paying wrestling fans.

Wrestling officials told me at the time that they believed the problem was subsiding, and that law enforcement and technological advancements were finally catching up with the unlawful streamers. But has anything really changed?

No sooner did federal agents shut down the pirate stream site atdhe.net than the site's webmasters set up shop under a new URL. And even as it faces a lawsuit by Ultimate Fighting Championship owners Zuffa LLC, video site justin.tv can still be found hosting dozens of illegal streams of just about any sports pay-per-view on any given weekend.

Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that the Pandora's Box that is illegal Internet streaming can be closed anytime soon. And, as the pirates keep cutting into wrestling promoters' profits, it's us—the paying wrestling fans—who subsidize their losses. □

KREW-CUTS

BY FRANK KREWDA

Raw vs. Smackdown. While WWE promotes both Smackdown and Raw as equal brands, it has in practice done some things recently that have given Smackdown a definite "B-show" feel—the past two Bragging Rights pay-per-views notwithstanding.

Consider some of these post-draft developments: Randy Orton is drafted to Smackdown and immediately defeats Christian for the World title. With Edge's retirement, Christian was thrust into the brand's top babyface role. However, it seems Christian inspired little faith from WWE Creative either as the top babyface or as champ. What does it say for "Captain Charisma" when Orton, a Raw transplant, blows into town and relieves him of the strap in a mere two days? The title change may have been part of a bigger storyline, as Orton has suggested on his Twitter account, but dropping the title in a squash so quickly still made Christian and the brand he represents look weak.

Also, look at Sin Cara's jump to the blue brand. WWE put a lot of hype into the acquisition of Sin Cara, calling a late-February press conference in Mexico City to announce the signing. After skipping the requisite tour of duty in Florida Championship Wrestling that most WWE newcomers face, the former Mistico worked some dark matches before making his television debut on *Raw* ... where he promptly botched a multitude of maneuvers despite turning in several otherwise impressive performances. Is it a coincidence that Cara was quickly drafted to Smackdown? Hardly. *Smackdown* is taped and edited. *Raw* is live. Sin Cara's miscues can be cut from *Smackdown*. They cannot be cut from *Raw*. If Sin Cara's move to Smackdown doesn't paint it as Raw's minor league, what does?

Let's face it, the appointed timeslots and rating numbers of *Smackdown* and *Raw* tell the story about brand dominance. Promoting Smackdown as if it is on the same footing as Raw is disingenuous.

Sky's the limit. The emergence of Winter and the role she has played in fracturing The Beautiful People may have the lovely Velvet Sky in a snit. But in some ways, Sky should be grateful to, not resentful of, Winter.

The time Sky has spent apart from Angelina Love has actually benefited her career. Where Sky was once content to place paper bags over various Knockouts' heads as part of an ensemble, she has most recently held her own as Kurt Angle's partner in several mixed tag matches, and has improved her in-ring performance by leaps and bounds, despite dropping a few singles bouts for her former ally Love.

Make no mistake: The Beautiful People—in all their versions—have always grabbed ratings on *Impact*, but now Sky commands attention for her wrestling as well as her stunning looks. Had Winter not come between her and Love, chances are Sky would still be rocking little more than the T&A routine in TNA.

Of course, we don't expect Velvet to ever totally abandon what works best for her—and we're certainly not complaining about that—but it is nice to see TNA reward her with some high-profile matches for all the hard work she's done to improve in the ring.

An iron will. In general, I am not an envious person. But I envy

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Celebrated for possessing impressive physical gifts, Velvet Sky, kicking her former friend Angelina Love, is now turning heads for using those gifts in a different way, and she has Winter to thank for it.

Ohio-based independent wrestler Gregory Iron. I don't envy him because after just five years in the wrestling business, the 24-year-old has achieved great fame and fortune. Those perks certainly haven't come his way just yet. I envy Iron because he possesses a personality trait that I don't—the ability to bravely face down adversity and turn a negative into a positive. That is exactly what Iron has been doing since nine months of age, when he was officially diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

Though he still experiences tightness on the right side of his body, Iron has fought through his physical limitations to forge a burgeoning career on the independent level in CAPW, PWO, and CHIKARA, and has even earned good reviews from WWE talent scouts after competing at a tryout camp. However, Iron has overcome much more than his disease.

As a child growing up in a household plagued with domestic violence and drug addiction, Greg often spent time with his grandmother, who shared his lifelong love of pro wrestling. This bond defrayed the pain for young Greg when his parents would clash.

Photo by Steve Csollak

Gregory Iron, who suffers from cerebral palsy, hasn't let his disability get in the way of forging a wrestling career. Frank Krewda feels Greg's inspirational message is worth spreading.

In his college years, Greg married his passion for weightlifting with his love of wrestling, which was rediscovered after attending local independent shows, and enrolled in Cleveland All Pro Wrestling's Training School, where Josh Prohibition and Johnny Gargano trained him. Even though his disability played no role, Iron says his early days were spent simply getting beat up.

A few months into his career, Greg would suffer a seizure and brain bleed after being dropped on his head following a German suplex from another trainee during a match. But Iron handled the setback in stride. Undaunted, and with no lasting effects from the seizure, he followed doctor's orders and slowly resumed his young career.

Iron's proudest moment came during a 2007 last-man-standing match that capped off a year-long feud with Gargano. Though he lost the match, Iron earned a standing ovation from the crowd of 900 that night. "Just the fact that I was supposed to be this freak that couldn't hang with a dude like Johnny, and I got up off the mat at the end brought them to their feet," Iron explained.

Indeed, the finish was emblematic of Iron's real-life ability to fall and rise again. It is a theme he has embraced throughout his career and continues to spread. Iron is no way ashamed of his disability. He even wears trunks adorned with a wheelchair graphic to signify his disability, and looks forward to one day delivering his inspirational message of overcoming adversity to WWE crowds worldwide.

In the meantime, Greg is happy to serve as a motivational speaker to the disabled of all ages. He also speaks to children's groups on topics such as peer pressure, domestic violence, and bullying.

Iron may never shed cerebral palsy, but doctors have told him his condition will not get any worse. And Iron is content with that prognosis.

"I took this handicap and turned it into a positive," he said. "My disability is what gives my character strength. And I think it's a message worth putting out there."

I agree. □

CHASING THE DREAM: ANGELINA LOVE

BY GERRY STRAUSS

The dedicated men and women who choose to pursue a career in professional wrestling rarely start anywhere near the top. Often, their roads are long, hard, and just plain weird. "Chasing The Dream" features an established wrestler who will reveal his or her long, strange path to stardom.

Angel Williams strikes a pose in her pool in 2004, just before receiving the phone call from Tommy Dreamer that would change her life.

BEAUTY, BRAINS AND talent can take a woman quite far in pro wrestling... but that doesn't make the journey an easy one.

For TNA Knockout Angelina Love, the road to superstardom began in the same place that her life did: north of the border. Born in 1981 and raised in Toronto, she fell in love with her future profession at an early age.

"I was about seven years old, and I was just flipping through the channels on TV," Angelina recounted. "The first thing I saw was 'Macho Man' Randy Savage drop an elbow from the top rope. The crowd went crazy and there were cameras going off all over the place... it drew me in right then and there!"

In 2000, Love decided to put her money where her mouth was. She tested the waters of independent wrestling by serving as valet for the likes of Eric Young and Chris Sabin, and soon began training for an in-ring career under the watchful eye of Rob "El Fuego" Etcheverria. Like many rookies, her first match didn't go so well.

"I went to an indy show to manage one of the male wrestlers, and they wanted a girls match," Angelina sighed. "I was asked to do it, but I let them know that I wasn't properly trained. Unfortunately, it didn't seem to matter to them. It was totally brutal!"

Love, then competing under the name "Angel Williams," continued to compete for various independent promotions around Canada, and eventually expanded to the United States. Her impressive physique and ever-expanding skill set caught the attention of promoters such as "Wild Samoan" Afa Anoa'i, who brought her in for various women's wrestling events that he was promoting in Pennsylvania.

In 2004, Angelina got a glimpse of her future when she was invited to compete against Trinity on a TNA event. However, destiny gave her a pit stop in the form of a tryout match with the WWE in June of 2004. Several months later, she got the most

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

The five-time Knockouts champion has had an up-and-down relationship with Velvet Sky. Right now, Angelina has no love for Velvet, but no one will be too surprised to see these two re-emerge as The Beautiful People.

important phone call of her life.

"Tommy Dreamer (then WWE talent recruiter) contacted me in October of that year because the company had just released Gail Kim, Nidia, and Jazz, and they were looking for new girls," Angelina recalled. "I went to a two-week long tryout camp at (former WWE developmental territory) OVW in November and got hired right before Christmas. I was Dreamer's first hire."

Soon after signing the contract, Love was shipped off to the WWE's other developmental school and promotion, Deep South Wrestling in Georgia. After several months of training, she made her in-ring DSW debut in September of 2005, defeating none other than Michelle McCool.

Her progress continued, but her roller-coaster ride was about to take a dip. On February 9, 2006, Love was injured during a match early in the night. She fought off the pain long enough to make her appearance in the event's DSW Diva Bikini Contest, but was unable to remain at ringside to manage Tommy Dreamer as scheduled. The severity of the injury was worse than she ever could have predicted.

"I completely tore my ACL and had to get reconstructive surgery on my knee," Love grimaced, clearly still affected by the memories of the injury. "It was so incredibly painful."

Recovery was not swift. In fact, it was only after seven months of dedicated rehabilitation that Love was able to re-enter a Deep South ring. She continued her unpredictable path in DSW, splitting her time between wrestling, managing the careers of others, and even serving as the promotion's general manager.

In April of 2007, Deep South Wrestling was shut down by the WWE, and Angelina and other remaining developmental talents were relocated to Louisville to continue their training with OVW. On May 16, 2007, she made her OVW debut with a dark match victory over Serena. The next day, she was let go from the company in what many considered a cost-cutting move.

Undeterred, Angelina continued to pursue her pro wrestling career by rededicating herself to the independent wrestling scene, both domestically and internationally. Her arrival in Mexico's AAA promotion marked the birth of a new identity: "Canadian Angel." She also continued to travel around the United States and Canada, gaining valuable exposure that would soon allow her to grab the attention of some very important people in Nashville.

In the fall of 2007, TNA decided to officially introduce a "Knockouts" division, a long-anticipated stage for the most talented females on the planet to showcase their wrestling skills. At Bound For Glory 2007, she was invited to compete in a 10-woman gauntlet battle royal to crown the first Knockouts champion. Gail Kim won the match, but Love had finally made her mark on a national platform.

Since then, Angelina has risen to the top of TNA. A former Knockouts champion, her on-again/off-again "Beautiful People" team with Velvet Sky has been a surefire ratings sparkplug for years. Two years ago, Love was temporarily released from the company due to work visa issues, but soon returned to reclaim her spot as one of the true "total packages" in wrestling today. □

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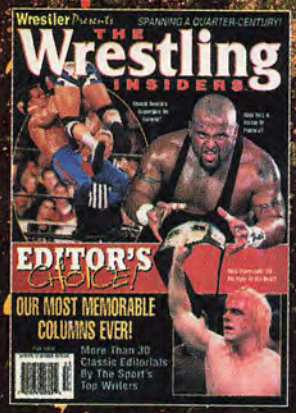

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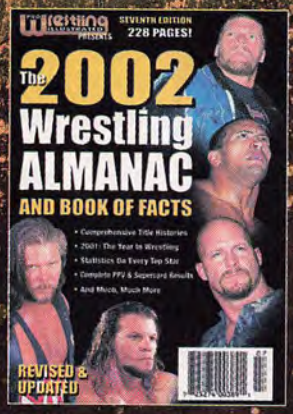

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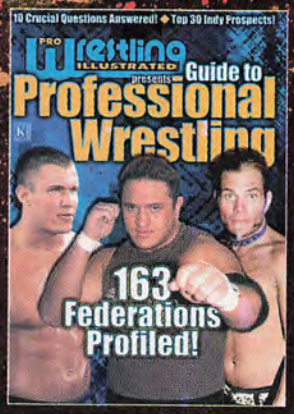

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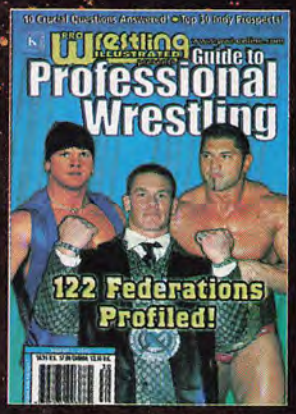

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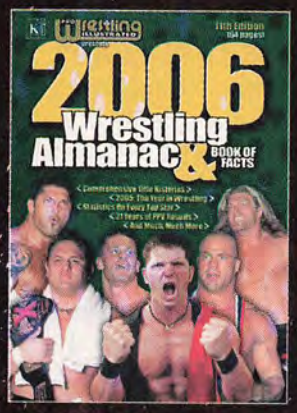

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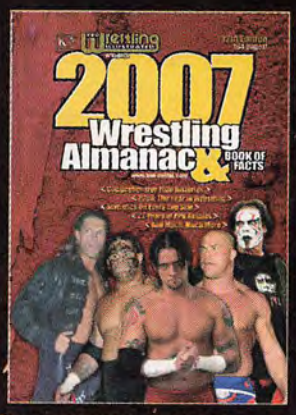

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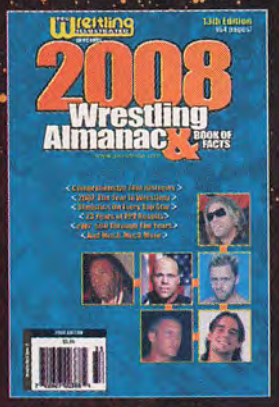

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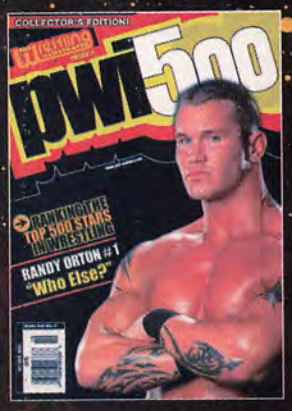

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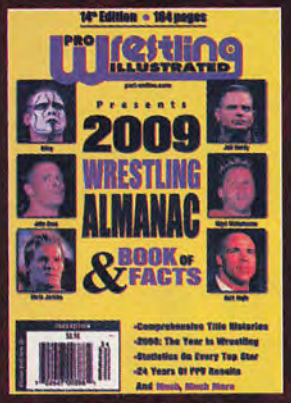

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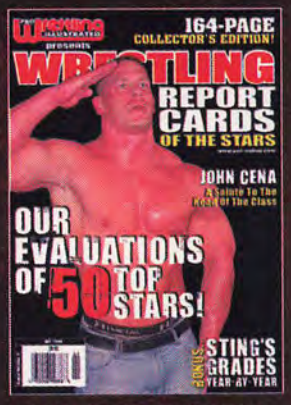

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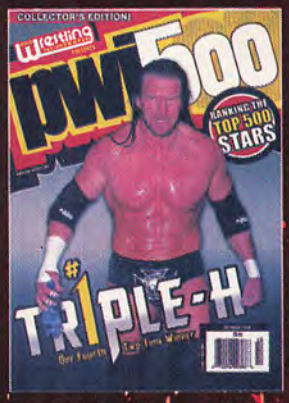

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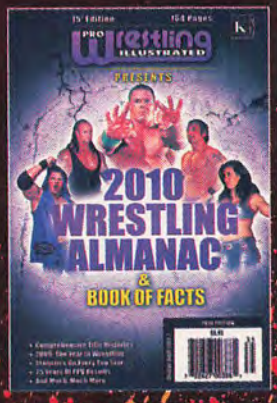

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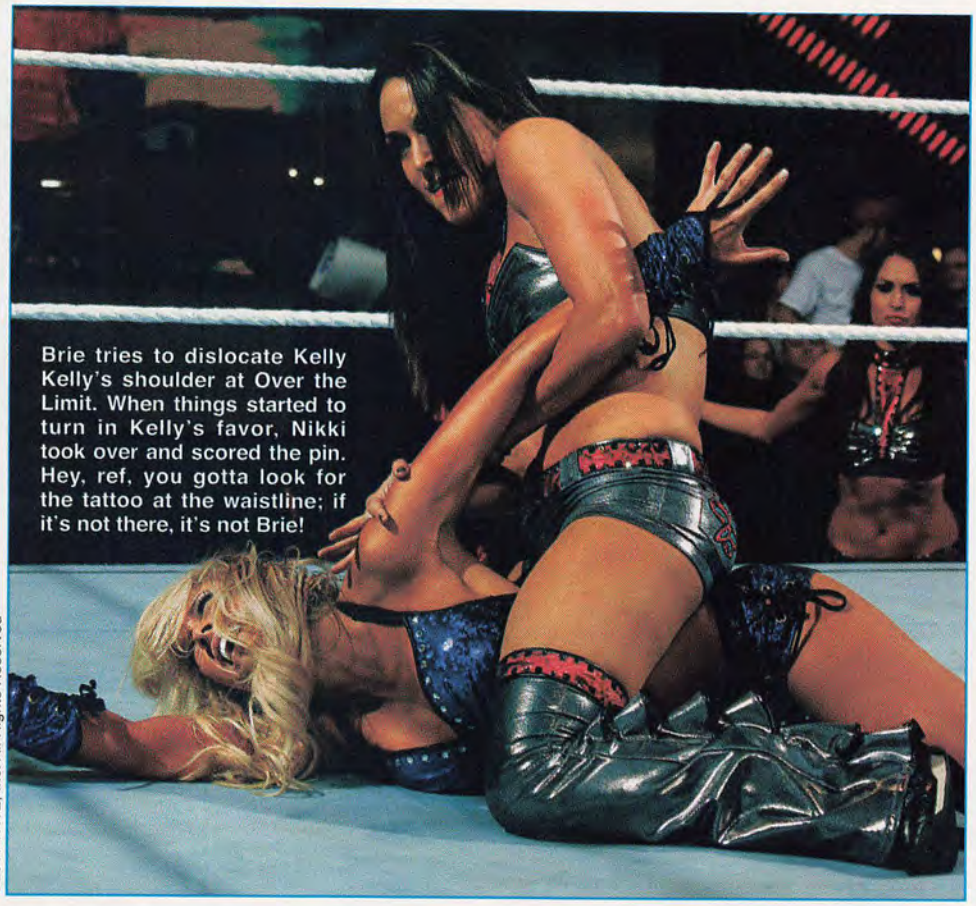

Brie tries to dislocate Kelly Kelly's shoulder at Over the Limit. When things started to turn in Kelly's favor, Nikki took over and scored the pin. Hey, ref, you gotta look for the tattoo at the waistline; if it's not there, it's not Brie!

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Brie Bella

FOR MOST OF their five-year careers under the WWE umbrella, twin sisters Brie and Nikki Bella have pretty much been interchangeable with one another. One has rarely appeared on screen without the other, and the twins have primarily worked either in tag teams or in non-wrestling capacities.

Sibling rivalry has erupted a few times between Brie and Nikki, most notably when both competed on screen for the affections of Daniel Bryan. But their occasional spats have always been settled quickly. When both sisters were jilted by Bryan in favor of Gail Kim, the twins turned heel and jealously assaulted Kim. They have heard boos from the crowd ever since.

Recently, a new challenge arose in the sisters' relationship when The Bella Twins independently challenged Divas champion Eve Torres. Nikki was unsuccessful in her March bout against Torres. A few weeks later, however, Brie defeated Torres to capture the belt. The victory marked the first WWE championship won by either sister.

Since winning the title, Brie has enjoyed her chance to bask in the individual spotlight. Speaking recently to ***PWI*** *Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda and contributing writers Al Alven and Bill Meltzer, Brie claimed that her victory proved she can stand on her own two feet. She confidently predicted that her win signifies a changing of the guard in the Divas division. Perhaps most intriguingly, Brie did not exclude Nikki from the list of people against whom she'd be willing to defend her title.*

Frank Krewda: Brie, belated congratulations on winning your first Divas championship. Does it feel strange to do interviews without Nikki?

Brie Bella: No, it doesn't feel strange at all. We have lives that are separate from each other, both personally and professionally. It's not like I need Nikki by my side 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Why would it feel strange for the WWE Divas champion to do her own interview? To me, it would be weirder if you had asked to talk to Nikki, too. Honestly, if you had asked both of us, I would have said no.

> **"If I ever wrestle against Nikki, I'll talk about it to your magazine afterward. Deal?"**

Krewda: Obviously, we asked for a solo interview because of you winning the belt. But don't you think it could have been interesting if we got Nikki's take on your title win, too? After all, you succeeded in beating Eve Torres whereas Nikki was unable to beat her for the belt.

Bella: First of all, don't try to stir up something between me and Nikki. My sister is happy for me and I would have been happy for her if she had been the first one to win the Divas championship. She was definitely capable of beating Eve. Second, why would be it be interesting to ask Nikki about it? When The Undertaker won the WWE title, was anyone concerned what Kane thought?

Al Alven: No, but then again, they are only half-brothers, not twins. But I get your point. If the Steiner brothers, the Harts, Von Erichs and any other number of brother combinations could have successful solo careers, then why not a pair of twin sisters.

Bella: Exactly. I talk for myself, think for myself and take care of business in the ring by myself. I've proven that once and for all. Now does one of you have a real question for me?

Bill Meltzer: Do you consider yourself a better solo wrestler than Nikki?

Bella: *Ugh*, another Nikki question. Look, I've got the title, and that says it all. Whoever holds the Divas championship is the top woman in this business.

Krewda: But what if Nikki had won the belt before you did? Would you say she's the best in the world?

Bella: Until I proved otherwise, yes. But we're not talking about 'what ifs' here. The reality is that you are talking to me right now, and not to Nikki, because I am the champion. If she someday wins the belt—and I think she eventually can—she'll have the chance to honestly say that she's the best in the world.

Alven: Is she capable of winning the title at your expense?

Bella: I'm not answering any more questions about Nikki. Once again, the three of you are trying to stir up trouble between The Bella Twins, and it won't work. This is

EVERY ISSUE, REPORTERS FROM PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED WILL PARTICIPATE IN AN INCISIVE PRESS CONFERENCE WITH A TOP WRESTLING STAR. THE QUESTIONS WILL BE DEMANDING. AND THE ANSWERS WILL REVEAL THE INNERMOST THOUGHTS OF THE GIANTS OF THE SPORTS

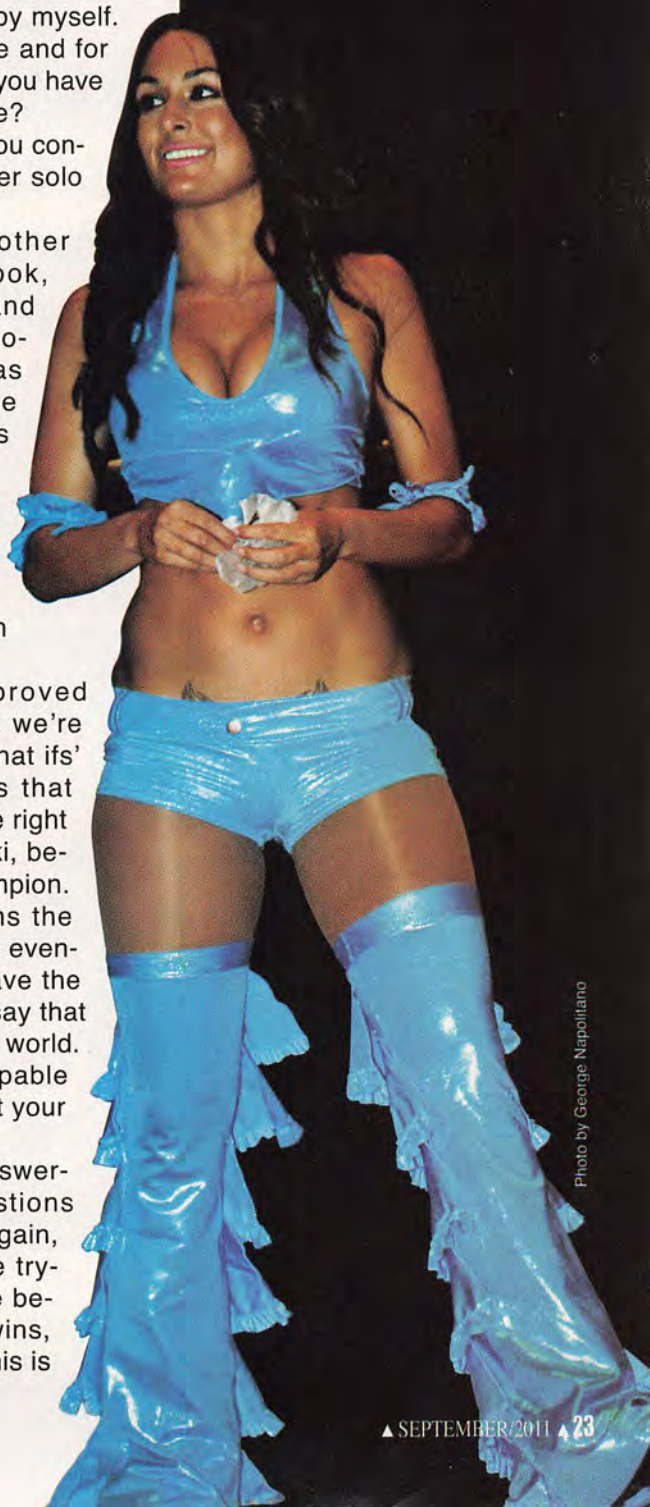

Photo by George Napolitano

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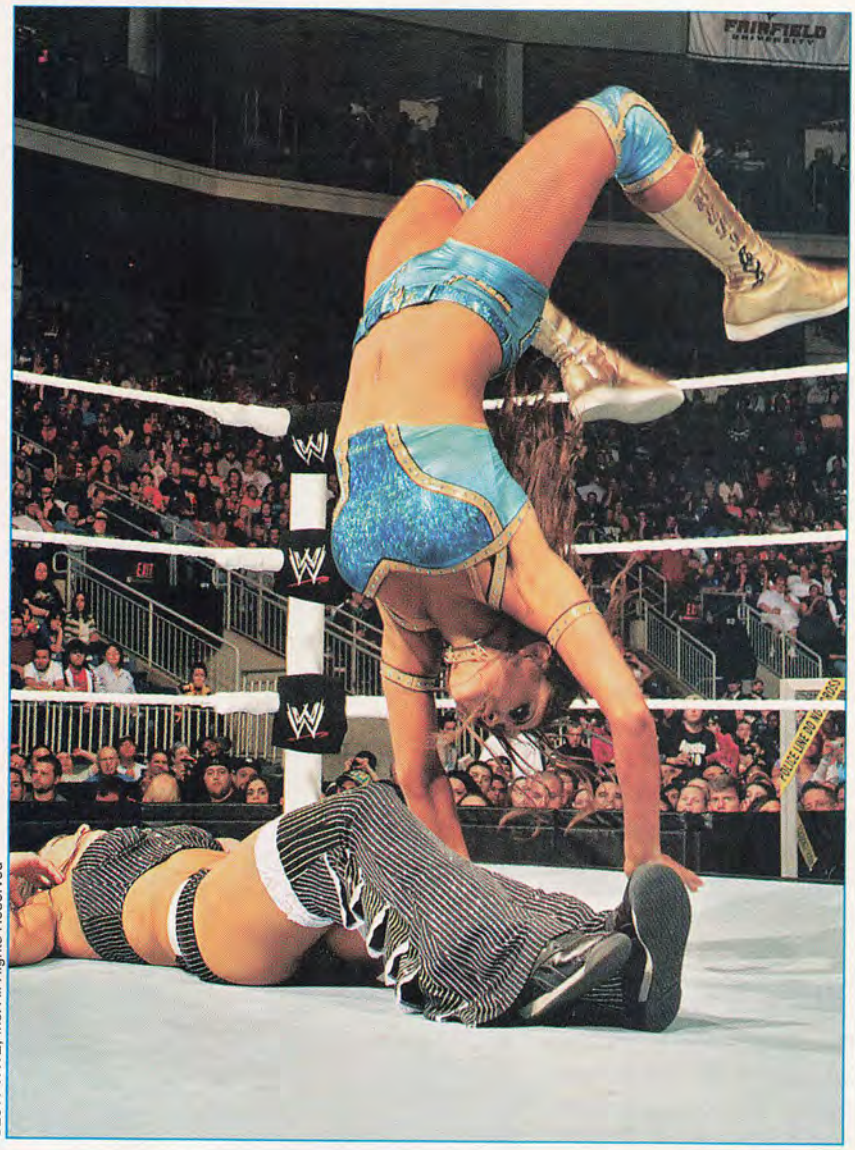
Nikki came close but couldn't get the job done against Eve Torres (above) in March. Five weeks later, Brie finished the job for the Bellas, capturing her first WWE title (below).



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the last thing I'll say about Nikki for right now: She understands that winning the Divas title is a huge step in my career. I'm positive it's something she wants to experience for herself, because it's everyone for themselves in singles wrestling. But I like where I'm at, and I intend on staying there a long time.

Alven: Would a title match between the Bellas be something like the championship tennis matches pitting the Williams sisters against each other? In other words, would it be something intriguing for the fans but pretty awkward for the sisters?

Bella: I just got finished telling you that I'm done talking about Nikki. I guess it's an interesting topic to you but it's getting real boring to me. If I ever wrestle against Nikki, I'll talk about it to your magazine afterward. Deal? If not, too bad. Let's move on to a different subject, or I'm going to cut this interview off.

Meltzer: This question isn't so much about Nikki, but about your preparation for facing Eve before you won the belt. Did you watch tapes of Torres' matches, including the one on *Raw* where she wrestled against Nikki?

Bella: No. I'm not all that big on watching tapes of what other Divas, including Nikki, have done against a particular opponent. Everyone has their own style to a different degree. I'd wrestled plenty of times against Eve before, although mostly in tag team matches. So I know her moves and what she tries to do in the ring. I prepared the same way to wrestle Eve for the Divas championship that I have for any of the other singles matches I've wrestled.

Krewda: Has it always been your goal to have a singles wrestling career?

Bella: Yeah. I will always love teaming with Nikki—no matter whether the fans are with us or against us—but singles wrestling is where it's really at if you are

going to step in the ring. There's a lot more to Brie Bella than just being one of the Bella Twins. I've proven that once and for all as Divas champion.

Alven: Are you disappointed that there's no Divas tag team championship, or at least that there hasn't been a recognized women's tag title in WWE since the 1980s?

Bella: Disappointed? Not really. If you look at the Divas roster, it's still small enough that it really only made sense to have the one singles title instead of two separate titles like the men have. There are lots of Divas tag team matches, but really not a tag team division.

Meltzer: If there were a WWE Divas tag team championship, do you think The Bella Twins would have won it?

Bella: Back to the 'what if' questions again, huh? If there were a Divas tag title, I have no doubt that we would have won it multiple times. I know what you are going to ask next. The answer is that even if there were a tag team championship, I still would have wanted to challenge for the singles title for the reasons I talked about before.

Meltzer: Actually, that is not what I was going to ask. I was going to ask you about the state of women's competition in general today. Do you think the Divas division is visible enough compared to the men, and are there enough outlets for women who want to break into the business to get the training and opportunities they need?

Bella: I think the opportunities are there if you look for them. There are always going to be more men than women who want to want to break in to the business, but it's real competitive either way.

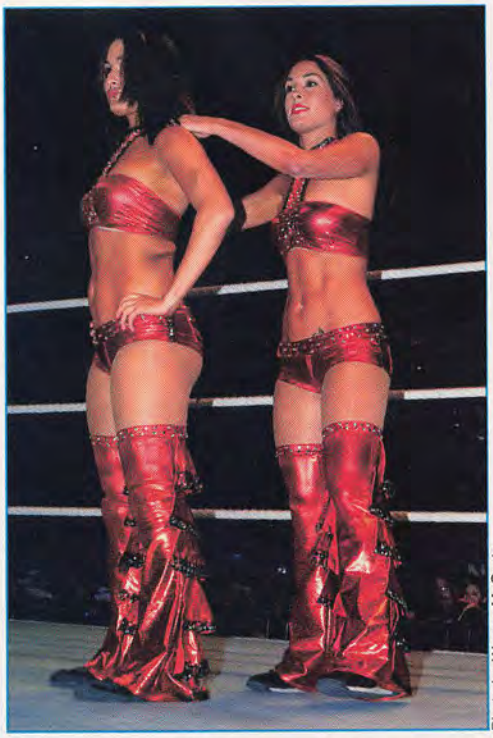


Photo by Wayne McCarty

Brie rubs down Nikki before a tag team match. As our interviewers learned, it's pretty hard to put a wedge between the Bellas.

There are only so many people who are going to make it to WWE, but there are other options out there, too. I really can't compare what it's like for women breaking in nowadays to what it was like many years ago. I can only speak for myself and, honestly, also for Nikki in this case. We worked real, real hard to get here and even harder to prove ourselves once we got the chance. We've also been treated well by WWE. As far as visibility, the Divas title is defended on almost every pay-per-view or at least the top Divas appear on the events in one way or another.

Krewda: Look ahead for us, if you will. Will there be more Divas titles in Brie Bella's future?

Bella: Without a doubt. No matter how long my first reign lasts, I didn't win the belt by accident. I'm going to be at or near the top of the Divas division for years to come, and no one had better dare try to stop me.

Krewda: Including Nikki?

Bella: I said no one, right? End of interview, guys. See ya. □

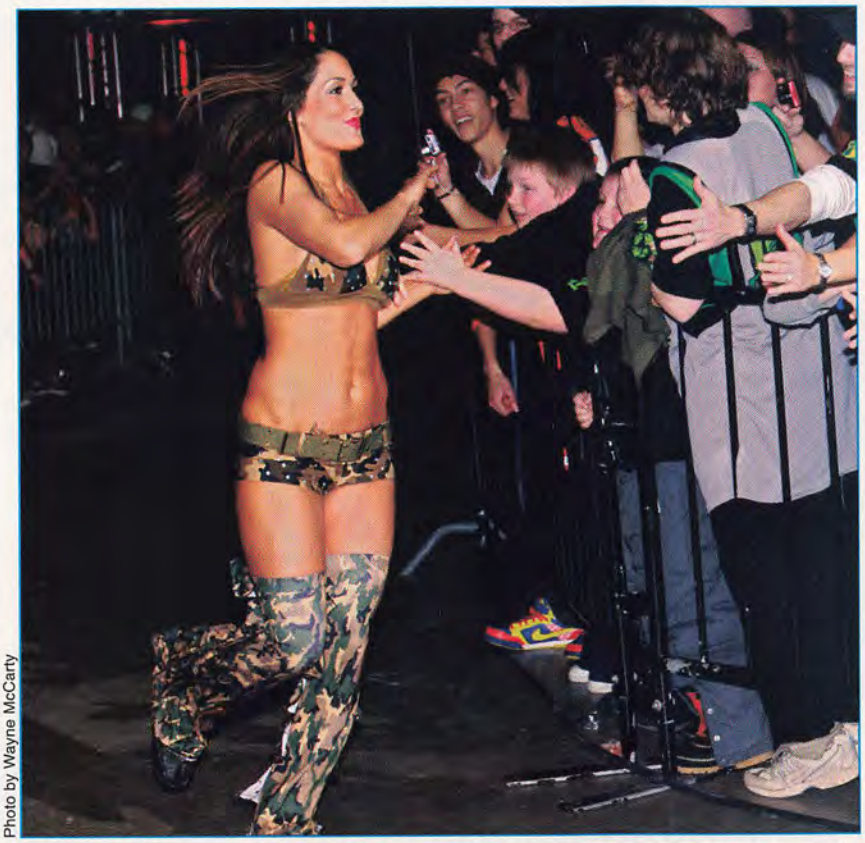
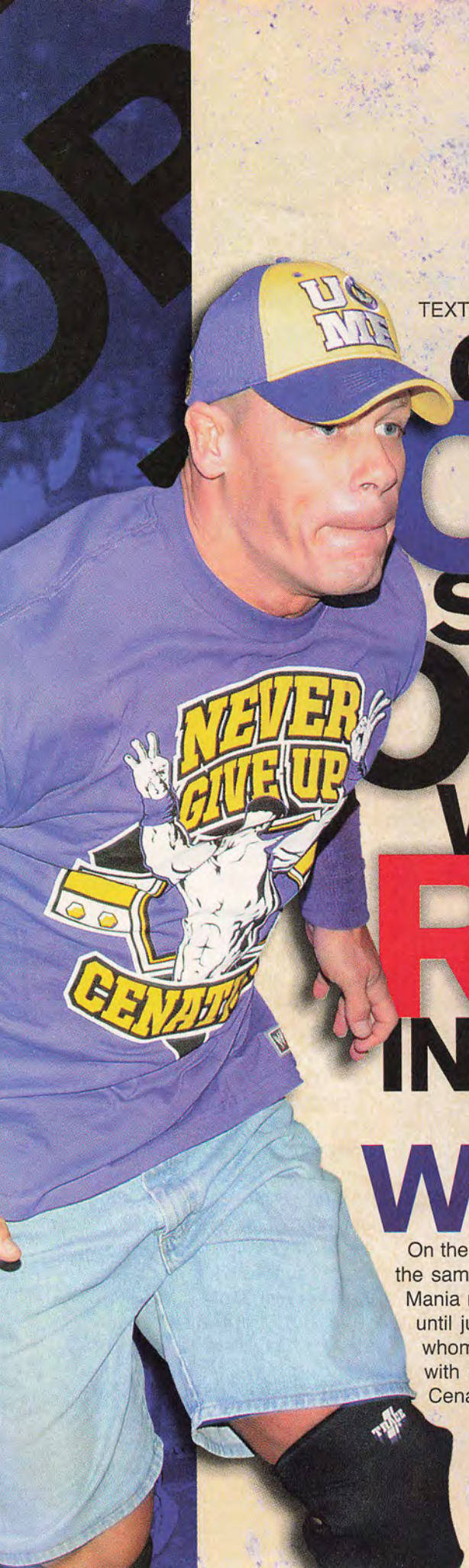


Photo by Wayne McCarty

Brie would like to accommodate the fans who are clamoring for a Bella vs. Bella bout. While she hasn't come right out and said she will defend the title against Nikki, she hasn't ruled it out, either.

Photo by George Napolitano

Photo by George Napolitano



TEXT BY **BILL MELTZER**

CAN CENA STAY ON TOP WITH ROCK IN HIS HEAD?

WWE FANS MIGHT be wild with anticipation for the John Cena-Rock match at WrestleMania 28, but for Cena, knowing so far in advance who his opponent at 'Mania will be is a blessing and a curse.

On the "blessing" side of the ledger, Cena will not be subjected to the same drama other WWE wrestlers are each year as WrestleMania nears. Unlike many of his peers who must sometimes wait until just a week before the event, Cena already knows exactly whom he is facing and where he's slotted on the card. Therefore, with plenty of time to study what The Rock brings to the ring, Cena can devise a strategy that will help him prevail at 'Mania.

Photos by Matt Roberts

Despite, or maybe because of, their differences, Cena (above) and The Rock (left) joined forces to fend off an attack from The Corre on *Raw*. Apparently, it seems neither man will allow anything or anybody to jeopardize their WrestleMania main event.

On the "curse" side, Cena has all this time to obsess over getting revenge on The Rock. That gives Cena plenty of time to psych himself up ... and to lose his WWE title, which is precisely what those who know him fear might happen if he looks too far ahead to his match with The Rock.

While any other wrestler would be able to use such abundant lead time to his advantage, Cena will be busy defending the WWE heavyweight championship, attending charity events, appearing on mainstream talk shows, granting radio and podcast interviews, and performing all the other tasks demanded of WWE's most visible superstar.

Plus, fending off the likes of Alberto Del Rio, The Miz, Sheamus, and CM Punk, all of whom figure to challenge Cena

for his title before WrestleMania 28 gets here, is a full-time job that demands 100 percent focus.

But with The Rock's taunts, insults, and disrespect still swirling in his mind, is Cena capable of focusing on more pressing matters as long as he has April 1, 2012, mentally circled on his calendar?

"I have business to handle week in, week out," Cena explained. "I can't look past this week, much less look ahead to April. As WWE champion, I have an obligation to be 100 percent prepared for all challengers. So I intend to just keep doing what I've been doing, which is defending my title."

Even though Cena is saying the right things, some feel there's no way he can *not* fixate on his match with The Rock at WM 28. If the war of words between Cena and The Rock that preceded WM 27 revealed anything, it's that Rocky can get in Cena's head. After all, if The Rock's words didn't bother him, Cena wouldn't have responded on

PWI READERS GIVE CENA SLIGHT EDGE

Much like we do in preparation for the "*PWI* Poll" each year, we surveyed 200 random *PWI* subscribers to see who they felt would come away from WrestleMania 28 victorious—The Rock or John Cena.

The voting was tight, and subscribers gave Cena a slight edge over The Rock. Cena earned 50 percent of the vote and Rock garnered 48 percent. Two percent of the subscribers we polled said the match would end in a draw, DQ, or no-contest.

Many of those who voted for Cena pointed to The Rock's extended layoff from the ring as the determining reason for their vote. While nobody called The Rock rusty, many feel that Cena is just the physically fresher man.

Cena may very well have a physical edge over Rock, but the intangibles, which often come into play in big matches, favor "The Great One." And while Cena has the support of CeNation, The Rock seems to have the support of the *entire* WWE Universe. From the beginning of their feud, fans have expressed nothing but appreciation and love for The Rock, while Cena has elicited the usual mix of cheers and boos.

Here's how that dynamic becomes a factor at WrestleMania 28: Despite saying he can take the boos in stride, the urge to win over the 'Mania crowd at The Rock's expense could become a distraction that causes Cena to do things he normally wouldn't do in the ring. To beat The Rock, Cena must wrestle *his* match at WM 28. Deviating from the things that work for him puts Cena at risk of losing. Cena may be younger, faster, and stronger, but The Rock is more experienced, savvier, and knows how to exploit a mistake. What he might lack in physicality compared to Cena, The Rock can make up for with guile.

—Bill Meltzer

Cena in a squeaker?

Photo by Matt Roberts

Though Cena would love to trounce Rocky before April 1, he must try to put "The Great One" out of his mind. With the WWE title belt around Cena's waist, focusing on The Rock could prove disastrous for him.

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Twitter and *Raw* each and every time The Rock fired off a new salvo.

After the way Rock attempted to humiliate Cena week after week on *Raw* and at WM 27, where his interference cost Cena the main-event title match against The Miz, it is only natural for Cena to become preoccupied with getting revenge.

"I can understand John wanting to repay the favor to The Rock at WM 28," said Evan Bourne. "Not only did The Rock insult him, he also cost John the WWE championship at WrestleMania. I'm not so sure I'd be able to control myself if I were in John's shoes, but if he doesn't, he risks losing everything. I just hope he can stay focused on the here and now."

For Cena, the "here and now" is firmly connected to WrestleMania 28. It is important to Cena (and WWE) that he enters the event as the WWE champion, so as to give the main-event match even greater significance. Clearly, defeating The Rock in a title defense at WM 28 would make the victory all the more gratifying for Cena. But, unless he trains all his resources into remaining champion, Cena could very well lose the title, which would take some of the shine off the match. To ensure he keeps his spot at the top of the WWE pecking order and that the bout comes off with the proper fanfare, Cena must find a way to keep The Rock out of his head, which obviously has been a challenge.

As if The Rock's ever-running mouth doesn't already have Cena's head twisted, some have suggested there may even be some professional jealousy at play, as well. Cena was accustomed to being the "face of WWE"

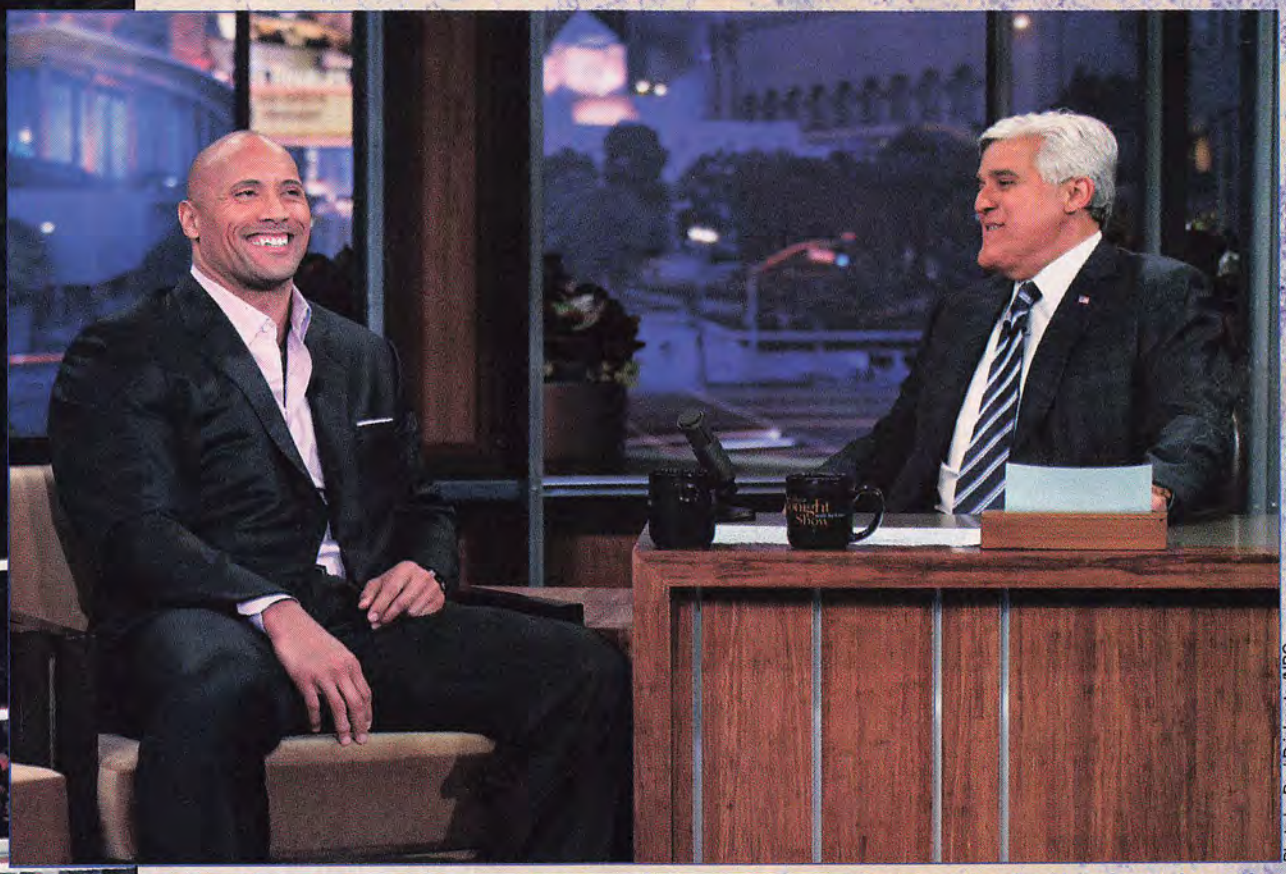

Photo by Paul Drinkwater/NBC

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Could professional jealousy be eating away at Cena as he awaits WM 28? After all, The Rock, chatting with Jay Leno (above), has accomplished more mainstream success than Cena, and when was the last time WWE dedicated an entire episode of *Raw* to Cena's birthday, as it did for The Rock in May (left)?

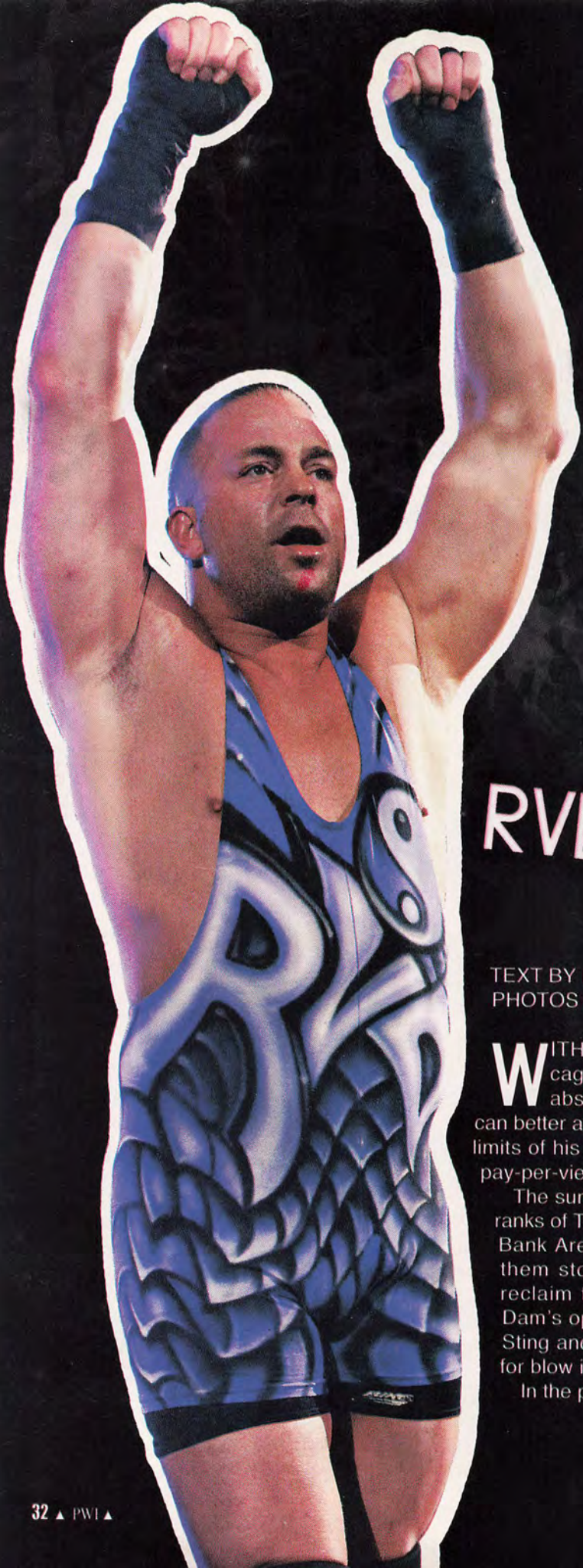
for quite a few years. Along comes The Rock, who has achieved far greater mainstream success to this point, and he immediately tries to steal Cena's spotlight.

"Let's just say celebrating The Rock's birthday on *Raw* didn't help anything," Bourne said. "John's the most competitive guy I know. He feels like Raw is his brand. He isn't happy The Rock just walked in after seven years and tried to take over. But he can't let it mess with his mind. He's got too much to lose."

How Cena responds to The Rock during the build-up to WrestleMania 28 is entirely up to him. Any reputable therapist will tell you we can't control how people treat us, but we can control how we react to the way people treat us. Will Cena flake out over The Rock's provocations and take his eye off the ball, or will he keep his cool and take a measured approach to the challenges ahead of him?

So far, Cena has stopped short of physically attacking The Rock when the two have shared a *Raw* ring. In fact, Rock and Cena even joined forces to deliver a post-match beatdown to Wade Barrett and The Corre. Maybe Cena is finally getting over The Rock's disrespect. Or, perhaps he's protecting The Rock until he can unleash his own hell on him at WrestleMania 28.

Either way, John Cena is staring squarely at what could be a career-altering year. And with The Rock already in his head, there's no guarantee he'll survive it. □



Let the

RVD Will Not Cave

TEXT BY **MIKE BESSLER**
PHOTOS BY **LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING**

WITHIN THE CONFINES of a 15-foot-high steel cage, the notions of "right" and "wrong" become abstract concepts, at best. Perhaps no wrestler can better attest to this than Rob Van Dam, who tested the limits of his own moral compass at this year's Lockdown pay-per-view in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The sun had barely set on the "Queen City" when the ranks of TNA's finest collected under the roof of the U.S. Bank Arena seeking vengeance and victory. Among them stood Rob Van Dam, once again seeking to reclaim the elusive TNA World championship. Van Dam's opponents for the evening, reigning champion Sting and former champ Mr. Anderson, met RVD blow for blow in an intense battle for supremacy.

In the penultimate moments of the three-way contest,

Hulk Sulk!

To Political Pressure

RVD delivers a standing splash to Mr. Anderson. Van Dam was taken aback when Hulk Hogan offered him a lead pipe in the three-way title match at Lockdown. Clearly, Van Dam feels he doesn't need Hogan or Immortal to thrive in TNA.

Van Dam received an olive branch of sorts—in the form of a weapons-grade metal pipe—courtesy of Immortal leader Hulk Hogan. It was a tempting offer, to be sure. As Van Dam's two opponents lay before him, one could easily appreciate the fleeting temptation to use Hogan's weapon to dispatch Sting and Anderson, thereby seizing the opportunity to reclaim the coveted title. But Van Dam's independent streak prevailed and he tossed the pipe back to Hogan, thus spurning the offer to join TNA's most influential faction.

The decision was not without immediate consequences, however. Van Dam ultimately lost his bid for the TNA championship when Anderson recovered Hogan's weapon and dealt him a debilitating blow. Anderson himself fell victim to a well-timed Scorpion Death Drop and Sting subsequently retained the championship.

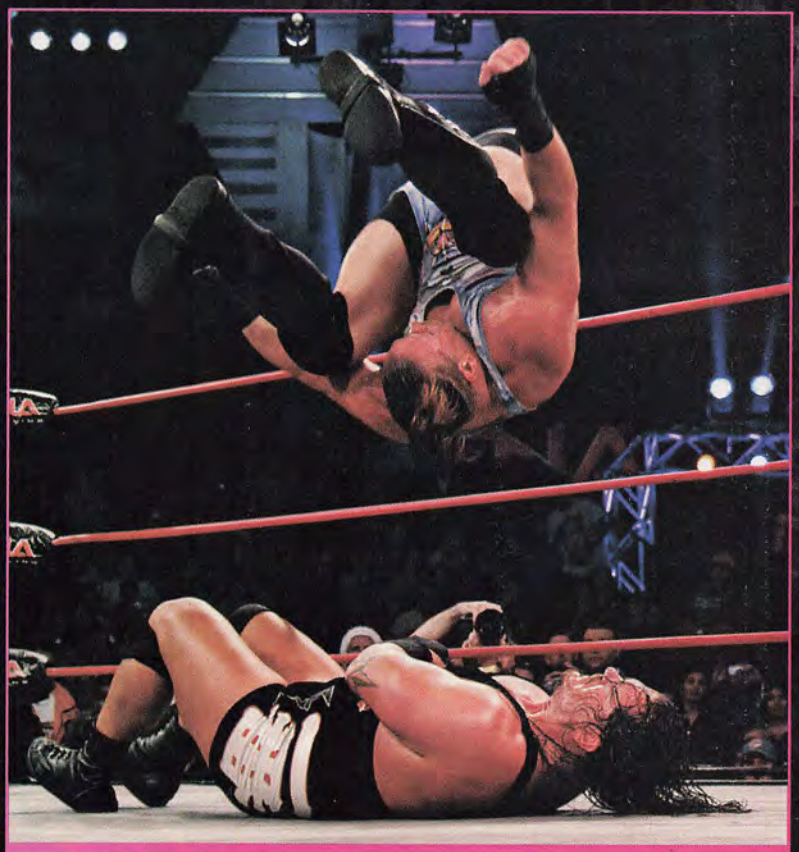
Although Van Dam would have certainly preferred a victory at Lockdown, he's looking to score championship gold on his own terms. "I have to stay true to myself," explained Van Dam. "My own fists and feet have gotten me this far, and I don't need handouts from Hogan or anybody else to find my way back to the top of the mountain."

Hulk Hogan quickly lashed out at Van Dam's audacious display of nonconformity: "Somebody forgot to tell RVD that opportunity only knocks once!" ranted Hogan. "I gave RVD a shot at immortality and he spit right in my face. You can bet that he deserves every bit of what we've got in store for him."

With a rogues' gallery of henchmen working at his behest, Hogan certainly possesses the means to dole out heavy doses of punishment, but RVD is no rookie when it comes to standing up to authority.

Van Dam's outlook regarding the present situation is based largely on his veteran experience and acute sense of self-preservation. "I don't understand why Hogan's bent out of shape," Van Dam said. "Look at my career. I've never been a joiner or a follower. I've always been my own boss, and that's how it's going to be in TNA. I know Hogan is used to getting his way, but I just don't cave in to political pressure."

Aside from his fierce self-determinism, part of RVD's appeal has been his professional integrity. By his own admission, giving the most memorable match on any given card has always been a primary motivator throughout his career. Accordingly, if he is



Even when wrestling a powerhouse like Rhino, Van Dam is unwilling to take shortcuts. To do so would be admit that he can't win on his own, and RVD has too much pride to ever let that happen.

to win the TNA World title again, he wants to do it by virtue of his skills, not the help of Immortal. To RVD, leaning on Hogan and Immortal for help in reclaiming the championship would demean the accomplishment and call into question his own ability.

"I'm capable of winning the title on my own," RVD explained. "I put everything I have into my matches, always have. Why would I even give the impression that I need Hogan's help? Everybody knows I can hang with the best in TNA without taking any shortcuts."

While few TNA wrestlers doubt Van Dam's in-ring talents, some say accepting Hogan's assistance at Lockdown was about more than winning the TNA championship. It was about making an ally, rather than an enemy, of the company's most powerful personality.

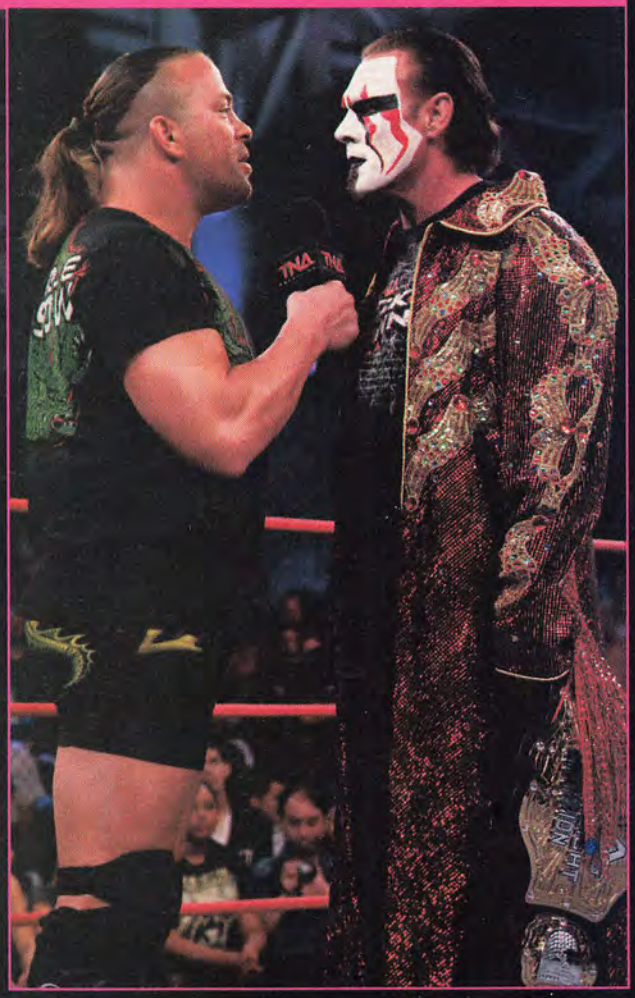
After standing up to quality adversaries like Anderson (above) and Sting (below), Van Dam can't understand why Hogan thought he'd bow to his and Immortal's overtures at Lockdown. RVD may have lost out on the title, but he left the show with his pride.

One wrestler, who requested anonymity, says Van Dam didn't even consider the long-term fallout of refuting Hogan at Lockdown. "You gotta know you're headed for trouble when you turn down Hogan," he said. "I know RVD takes pride in being his own man, but sometimes pride has to take a back seat."

What this wrestler doesn't understand about RVD, though, is that Van Dam's pride is inseparable from the rest of his makeup. Without that pride, there is no career filled with five-star matches and jaw-dropping performances. There is no cultish legion of fans spurring him on. Without that pride, perhaps RVD doesn't even find himself fighting for the TNA World championship on that April night in Cincinnati. Without that pride, there is no RVD.

Matt Morgan, who knows a thing or two about dealing with Hogan, feels "The Hulkster" set himself up for failure by being so blatant in his attempt to woo Van Dam at Lockdown. "I'd expect Hogan to have a little more finesse than to hand Van Dam a pipe," he said. "This isn't ECW, where somebody tosses you a chair and you start swinging it. RVD would have looked like a chump if he used that pipe. Hogan should have realized that."

In any case, RVD and Hogan are not on the same page, and that ensures a bumpy ride for Van Dam in TNA. Then again, as somebody who doesn't bend to authority or give in to political pressure, RVD most likely can't wait to overcome this latest challenge in grand style. □



RANDY SAVAGE
(1952-2011)

ICONIC MEGASTAR HELPED RESHAPE PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING

TEXT BY **MIKE BESSLER**

AMONG THE STORIED ranks of wrestling's elite, there are but a handful of champions who endure the rigorous challenges of time, evolving into true legends and bona fide icons. Randall Mario Poffo, known worldwide as "Macho Man" Randy Savage, was one of the few grapplers to transcend the limits of the squared circle, casting an indelible imprint upon the very fabric of popular culture.

Randy Savage passed away on May 20. He crashed his vehicle after suffering a heart attack while driving near his home in the Tampa Bay, Florida, area. His wife of one year, Lynn, was with him at the time of the accident and she reportedly suffered only minor injuries.

Savage leaves behind a spectacular legacy of innovation and showmanship that is virtually unparalleled in the world of professional wrestling. He ascended through the ranks of wrestling's regional promotions throughout the 1970s and 1980s, ultimately reaching the dizzying heights of international superstardom as a main-event competitor with the WWF and WCW. A bombastic, over-the-top performer in every respect, Savage's work in the ring and on the mike established him as an archetype for the entire industry of professional wrestling.

The son of professional wrestler Angelo Poffo, Randy initially pursued a career in baseball, playing for a handful of minor league teams in the early-1970s. During some down time between seasons, he began wrestling, working some of his earliest bouts in Atlanta's Georgia Championship Wrestling. His hard-hitting, aggressive style prompted Ole Anderson to suggest Randy adopt the name "Savage" as his

MACHO

ring moniker. Although Savage obtained valuable experience and perspective as an undercard performer in the South and Midwest, his work in Lexington, Kentucky's International Championship Wrestling ultimately elevated him to main-event status. Founded in 1978 by Angelo Poffo, ICW was largely built around Poffo's two biggest stars: Randy Savage and Savage's younger brother, "Leaping" Lanny Poffo. Also employed through ICW was Liz Hulette, who worked as a host of ICW's televised shows. Hulette and Savage married in 1984.

Savage's run as one of the top talents in ICW allowed him to hone his in-ring techniques through highly physical, violent feuds with regional standouts like Ronnie Garvin as well as obscure characters, including the menacing ghoul known as Ratamyas.

An interpromotional rivalry between Poffo's ICW and the Memphis-based Continental Wrestling Association effectively provided Savage, along with Angelo Poffo and Leaping Lanny, with an opportunity to formally join CWA when Poffo's ICW folded in 1984. Savage became well-known as an unstoppable force in the Memphis area, engaging hometown hero Jerry "The King" Lawler in a jaw-dropping, high-octane feud. Savage cut a wide swath through his new stomping grounds, punctuating his in-ring performances with outrageously raucous interviews peppered with boastful tirades and signature catch phrases like "Ooooh yeah!" and "Dig it!" His underhanded tactics often drew the ire of audiences, but the unpredictable over-the-top theatrics of "Macho Man" Randy Savage brought fans pouring into packed venues week after week.

WWE Hall of Famer Jimmy Hart, a mainstay in the Memphis scene in its heyday, worked closely with Randy Savage from his early days in the territory, building a professional relationship and friendship that spanned over three decades. "We all loved Randy," Hart recalled. "He was special. He was different. He was James Dean and Marlon Brando. It was in the way he dressed and the way he talked. He had that charisma and that magic. He had *it*." To be sure, Hart held Savage's abilities in high regard, and when Hart signed with the WWF in the mid-1980s, he was quick to send word back to Savage that the WWF was looking for new additions to its burgeoing roster.

As Vince McMahon's World Wrestling Federation gained an increasing market share, finding work in the dwindling number of territories became increasingly difficult, and many wrestlers, including Savage, looked for more stable employment outside of the ring. "Randy was selling Amway before he was picked up by the WWF," Hart recalled. "To get a hold of him, I had to act like I was placing a big order of Amway stuff so he'd take my call. When I told him the WWF was interested in him, the first thing he asked was, 'Do you think they'll take Liz and Lanny?' Family was just so important to him. He loved them and he just didn't want to leave them behind."

Indeed, the WWF ultimately signed all three of the ICW alumni, and while Lanny enjoyed notoriety as "The Genius," it was Savage's abilities, performance, and work ethic that established him as a rising star of wrestling's new "Golden Age." Managed by his wife Liz—now re-christened "Miss Elizabeth"—Savage enhanced his image by donning brightly colored tights, fringed jackets, sunglasses, and bedazzled cowboy hats, creating a spectacular persona that rapidly came to outshine those of his peers. He engaged in a series of noteworthy feuds with established talents such as Tito Santana and George "The Animal" Steele. At WrestleMania III, Savage locked up with Ricky Steamboat in a stunning *tour de force* of holds and maneuvers that is still largely considered as one of the finest matches in the history of professional wrestling.

1. Savage and his brother, Lanny Poffo, agreed to a challenge match in 1984 exclusively for *PWI* in Memphis, with Jerry Lawler serving as referee. Unfortunately, this classic scientific encounter (won by Savage) was not taped.

2. Savage's match with Rick Steamboat before 93,000-plus at WrestleMania III in Pontiac, Michigan, was *PWI's* Match of the Year for 1987 and is still considered one of the five greatest matches in 'Mania's rich history.

3. Savage won his first of two WWF World titles by beating Ted DiBiase in the final round of a one-day tournament at WrestleMania IV in Atlantic City in 1988. Utilizing his incredible stamina, Savage beat Butch Reed, Greg Valentine, and One Man Gang en route to the finals.

4. As Hulk Hogan reaches out to grab Savage's manager, Sherri Martel, in 1989, the "Macho Man" springs into action. The two icons of the WWF and WCW had a stormy, up-and-down relationship both inside the ring and out.

5. The "Macho Man" always kept a watchful eye on the lovely Elizabeth, whom he married in 1984 and then "married" again for the wrestling community in a WWF ring seven years later.

As his career gained momentum, Savage earned a new reputation as a fan favorite and consistently held the respect and admiration of audiences worldwide. He partnered with some of the industry's biggest talents in the likes of Hulk Hogan and The Ultimate Warrior and joined countless scores of villainous opponents in battle throughout his time in the WWF and WCW. Of all his victories in the ring, however, it's likely that no moment was more emotional than his "wedding" to Miss Elizabeth at SummerSlam 1991. The ceremony, held inside of a WWF ring amid elaborate fanfare, moved many audience members to tears as they bore witness to the well-staged culmination of a longstanding on-screen romance. Although the heartfelt moment was something of an odd juxtaposition given Savage's reputation as an explosive competitor, those who knew him personally were well aware of his gentler side. "Randy played his character in and out of the ring, but he was really one of the nicest guys you could ever meet," explained Hart.

Savage and Miss Elizabeth divorced in 1992, but the couple would work together again in subsequent years as the enduring on-screen chemistry of the duo resonated with longtime fans and supporters. Tragically, Elizabeth passed away in 2003 as the result of substance abuse.

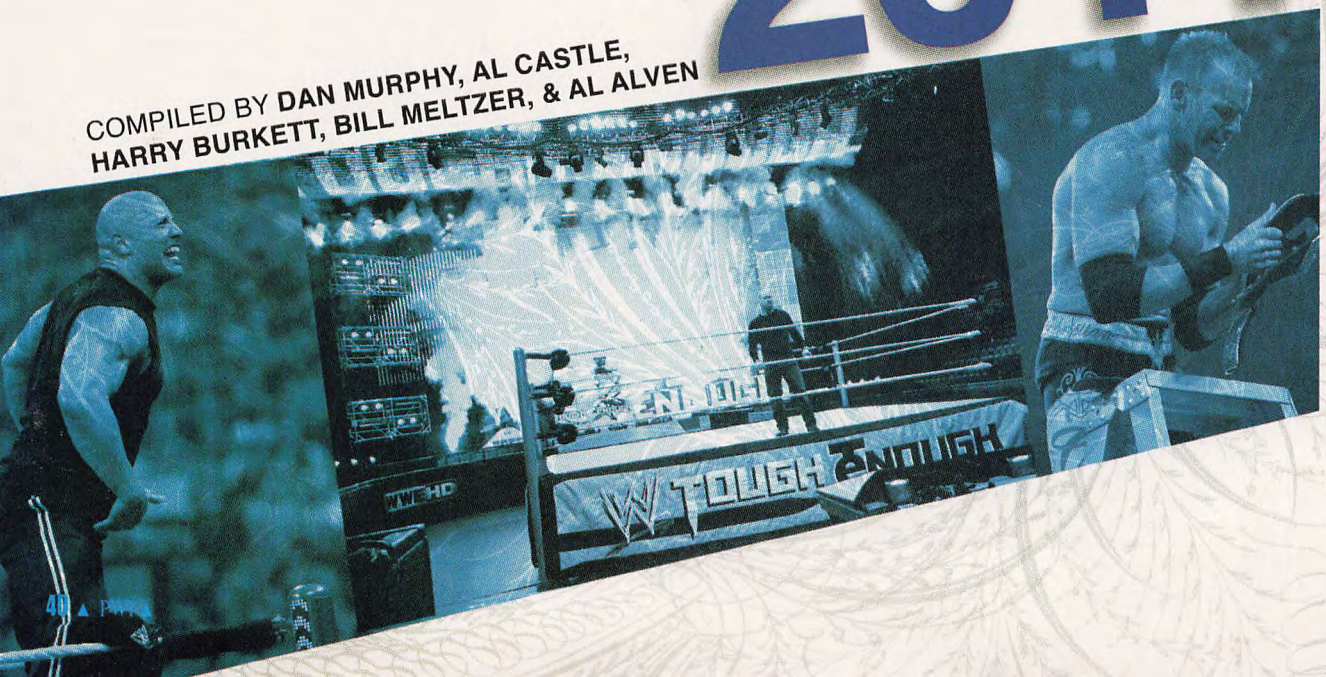
Savage's abrupt and controversial departure from the WWF in late-1994 prompted much speculation as to the nature and cause of his split with the company. While he attained accolades and championship gold during his subsequent work in WCW from 1995 to 1999, and he embarked on a relatively short run with TNA several years later, many fans held out hope that Savage would someday return to McMahon's fold as either part of WWE's talent roster or as an inductee to the WWE Hall of Fame.

Although Savage did not return to the ranks of WWE in the years following his estrangement from the company, he found enjoyment working in other facets of the entertainment industry, including his memorable gig as the outspoken celebrity spokesperson for Slim Jim. He earned a fitting role as the villainous professional wrestler Bonesaw McGraw in the 2002 major motion picture *Spider-Man*. He also worked as a voiceover actor for a number of animated features and series.

Even after his most recent departure from in-ring work, Savage was consistently recognized as an important part of the history and sustained success of the industry. Jay Lethal paid homage to The Macho Man through his Savage-inspired character "Black Machismo." In 2009, WWE released *Macho Madness: The Randy Savage Ultimate Collection*, a career retrospective DVD set featuring the greatest moments of Savage's work in the WWF and WCW. On the May 23, 2011, episode of *Monday Night Raw*, WWE marked the passing of Randy Savage with a heartfelt memorial tribute. □

MID-YEAR REPORT: RELIVING THE FIRST HALF OF 2011

COMPILED BY **DAN MURPHY, AL CASTLE, HARRY BURKETT, BILL MELTZER, & AL ALVEN**



THE FIRST SIX months of 2011 have had their share of surprises, shakeups, and drama. They have also seen the top two promotions in the United States grapple with a fundamental question that will affect the future of the business as we know it: Does "wrestling" matter anymore?

For the past few years, the company formerly known as World Wrestling Entertainment has dabbled in projects outside of pro wrestling, including filmmaking and publishing. This spring, the company announced that it was officially changing its name from World Wrestling Entertainment to simply WWE, officially removing the word "wrestling" from its name. This is part of an ongoing process to rebrand WWE as an "entertainment company" as opposed to a "wrestling company."

TNA responded by announcing it was changing its TV show's name to *Impact Wrestling*, presumably the first move in a gradual rebranding process of its own that will finally remove the double-entendre "TNA" letters from its name and officially adding the word "wrestling." The company then began a promotional campaign called "Wrestling Matters Here" and went so far as to put up a billboard with that tagline right down the street from WWE headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut.

On the surface, the name changes are cosmetic, but they reflect a deeper debate on the nature of professional wrestling in the 21st century. So far in 2011, we have seen The Miz as WWE champion, Michael Cole as a top heel, and an actor by the name of Dwayne Johnson as the top draw of the mid-year. That's certainly more "entertainment" than traditional "wrestling."

But that doesn't mean the outlook for wrestling's future is all doom and gloom. Far from it. The first six months of 2011 have been a transitional period. Wrestling fans have had the best of both worlds—we have been able to enjoy incredible work from legends like The Rock, Triple-H, The Undertaker, and Sting, while watching exciting up-and-coming stars like The Miz, Alberto Del Rio, and Mr. Anderson. We've already seen several potential Match of the Year candidates as well as some unforgettable moments, including The Rock's WWE return, Edge's emotional retirement, Sting's surprising return to TNA, and the stunning image of a battered and exhausted Undertaker being assisted from the ring after yet another WrestleMania victory.

In the pages that follow, the PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED staff breaks down the half-year's top stories, best performances, and strangest moments.

It has already been an epic six months that promises to have a ripple effect on wrestling for months to come. Heck, the main event of WrestleMania 28 is already signed!

We hope you enjoy this look back at the opening six months of 2011. We're sure the second-half of the year will be just as tumultuous, exciting, and captivating.

[1] ROCK HOSTS WM 27; WILL WRESTLE CENA AT WM 28

Vince McMahon likes to claim that he—and, by extension, WWE—always gives the fans what they want. While this notion is debatable, there is no denying that the masses received at least one gift they had long been clamoring for when it was revealed that The Rock was making his return, albeit as host of WrestleMania 27 in Atlanta.

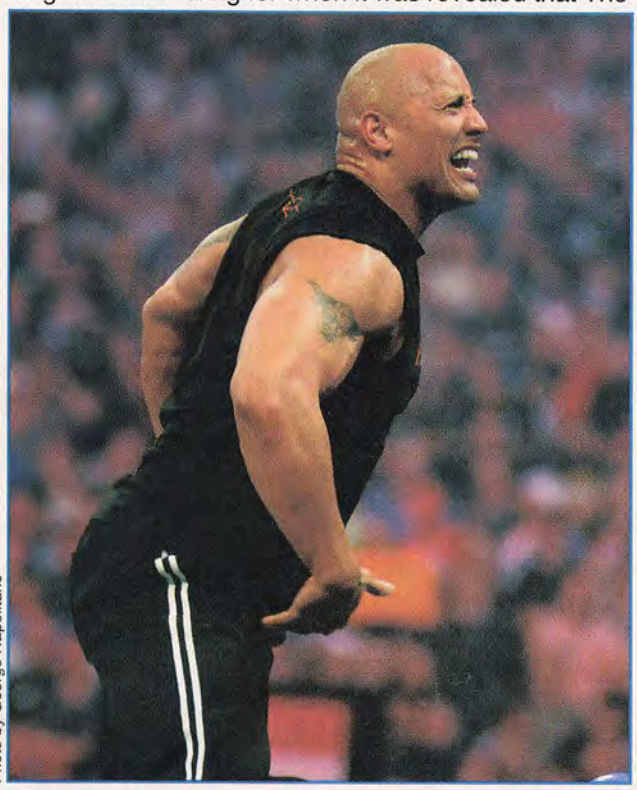


Photo by George Napolitano

Appearing before a live audience on *Raw* for the first time in nearly seven years, "The People's Champ" addressed the fans, Michael Cole, and then-WWE champion The Miz. But he saved his best verbal venom for John Cena, whom he referred to as "a big fat bowl of Fruity Pebbles."

In the weeks to follow, The Rock and Cena would continually take jabs at each other, each more vicious than the last. Cena took particular offense to The Rock's responses, which, aside from his initial return promo, were all aired via satellite from another location. It was only at the final *Raw* before WrestleMania that the two were in the same ring, with Cena blindsiding The Rock with an Attitude Adjustment.

Coming into the big show, The Rock's role as host was largely undefined. But, it was obvious he would get involved in some way in the main event, which saw Cena challenge The Miz for the WWE title. It finally happened after Cena and The Miz were both counted out of the ring. The Rock hit the ring and ordered the match to be restarted, then leveled Cena with a Rock Bottom. The Miz quickly capitalized to retain his championship.

The following night on *Raw*, Cena sought not revenge, but to challenge The Rock to a match at WrestleMania 28 in Miami. The Rock accepted.

[2] UNDERTAKER EXTENDS STREAK TO 19-0 AT WRESTLEMANIA

After defeating Shawn Michaels on wrestling's biggest stage two years in a row, many wondered who would step up to challenge The Undertaker and attempt to end The Streak. It came as some surprise that Triple-H himself returned out of nowhere on the same night The Undertaker re-emerged on *Raw* and engaged in a lengthy staredown with "The Phenom." Without either saying a word or laying a hand on the other, one of the marquee matches for WrestleMania 27 had been made.

The match itself proved to be the biggest challenge to The Undertaker's legendary streak to date. Triple-H, who had been beaten by The Undertaker at WrestleMania 17, took him to the limit in this no-holds-barred affair.

In the end, The Undertaker withstood everything "The Game" threw at him, including a vicious spinebuster through a table, three Pedigrees, and his own finisher, the Tombstone Piledriver. When Triple-H made one mistake and found himself trapped in The Undertaker's Hell's Gate submission hold, he had no choice but to tap.

The Undertaker, beaten and battered like never before, had to be carried from the ringside area on a motorized cart.

Photo by George Napolitano

[3] EDGE RETIRES DUE TO INJURY; VACATES WORLD TITLE

In an unprecedented move that caught many observers off-guard, the World title match between Edge and Alberto Del Rio was chosen to open WrestleMania 27. That Edge retained his championship with a clean pinfall victory was equally surprising to some; Del Rio had entered the match as the favorite, riding a wave of momentum from his Royal Rumble victory in January.

Still, those occurrences paled in comparison to what came next. For very few realized at the time that the title showdown in Atlanta would be the final match in the storied career of the "Rated R Superstar."

On the April 11 edition of *Raw*, one week and a day after WrestleMania, it was announced that Edge would be appearing to make a special announcement. Given that he was a member of the Smackdown roster, this immediately sent up warning signs.

In the ring, Edge informed the fans that he had been diagnosed with spinal stenosis and would follow his doctor's advice to retire. He went on to give a heartfelt speech, reflecting on his 13-year WWE career.

Later in the week, on *Smackdown*, Edge addressed his home brand roster and reluctantly, but honorably, laid the World title belt in the center of the ring.

At Extreme Rules, Edge enjoyed one more moment in the spotlight when he helped his lifelong friend and former tag team partner Christian fend off Alberto Del Rio's henchmen, as Christian won the vacant championship. The two embraced in the ring in one of the more emotional celebrations in recent memory.

[4] WWE ELIMINATES "WRESTLING" FROM ITS VERNACULAR

WWE's decision to phase out the "W-word" is certainly nothing new. For the past several years now, we've gotten used to hearing announcers refer to wrestling as "sports entertainment" and athletes as "Superstars" or "Divas." But the actual term "wrestling," except in rare cases or due to slip-ups, has been uttered less and less.

Thus, it really came as little surprise when the company announced in April that it was officially eliminating the word from its name altogether. Going forward, the company would simply be called "WWE."

The explanation given was that WWE was looking to rebrand itself as an "entertainment company," which in addition to wrestling will continue to focus on its other properties and use its considerable stockpile of cash to purchase other entertainment entities.

In essence, "wrestling" was removed as Vince McMahon continues to seek the mainstream acceptance he has long hoped to capture.

Effective immediately, any reference to the word "wrestling" was to be discontinued on WWE programming. The company took it so far that a *Raw* recap and discussion program called *Right After Wrestling* on The Score in Canada was changed to *Aftermath*.

TNA attempted to capitalize on the situation, rebranding its Thursday night program on Spike TV from *Impact* to *Impact Wrestling*, with the tagline "Wrestling Matters Here." Many believe this is the first step in the company eliminating the controversial TNA name in favor of Impact Wrestling.

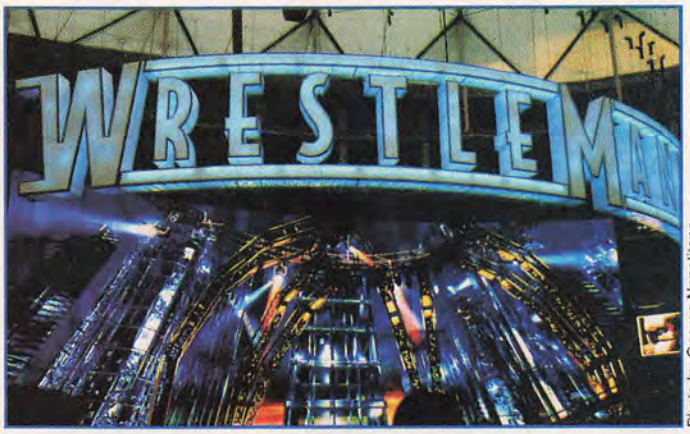


Photo by George Napolitano

[5] WRESTLING ICON RANDY SAVAGE DIES AT 58

The list of accolades earned by "Macho Man" Randy Savage would be enough to earn him a spot among the greatest wrestlers of all-time:

WWF World champion (twice) ... WCW World champion (four times) ... *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Famer (inaugural class of 1996) ... Six *PWI* Achievement awards (including Wrestler of the Year for 1988).

But Randy Savage, who died on May 20 after suffering a heart attack while driving and subsequently crashing his car into a tree, was more than a list of biographical facts on a Wikipedia page. It was men like he, Hulk Hogan, Andre the Giant, Ted DiBiase, and The Ultimate Warrior who were the heartbeat of the all-powerful WWF machine of the mid-1980s. The company built itself by bringing to life cartoon characters, but Savage—as over-the-top as he was—added something special. He wasn't just a man who wore crazy, colorful costumes and spoke with a throaty growl, he was an athlete in the truest sense of the word.

A former minor league baseball player, Randall Mario Poffo decided to follow in the footsteps of his dad, veteran wrestler Angelo Poffo, when he came to the conclusion that he couldn't hit a curveball. He perfected his new craft in the ICW and USWA before being hired by the WWF in 1985. He had a memorable feud with one-time Mega Powers tag team partner Hulk Hogan, whom he accused of lusting after his wife, Elizabeth. But the most important match he ever wrestled was against Rick Steamboat at WrestleMania III. Savage lost the Intercontinental title to Steamboat in a brilliant exhibition that produced a total of 19 two-counts.

Many wrestlers, including Chris Jericho, point to that match as the one that most influenced them growing up. *Ooh, yeah,* that's quite a legacy.

[6] VERBAL FEUD BETWEEN COLE, LAWLER GETS PHYSICAL

The heel bias Michael Cole first exhibited while calling the action on *NXT* carried over to his work on both *Raw* and *Smackdown*, with the 14-year veteran announcer openly rooting for The Miz and several other rulebreakers and proclaiming himself the "Voice Of The WWE" while belittling Hall of Famer Jim Ross.

The latter, in particular, irritated longtime *Raw* color commentator Jerry Lawler, but "The King" was able to keep his cool and was generally able to blow off Cole's rantings. That was, until Lawer came inches away from defeating The Miz for his first WWE championship in a ladder match, only to be thwarted in the end due to interference by Cole himself.

Photo by George Napolitano

Cole took things to a whole different level when he made light of the passing of Lawler's mother. He also invited Lawler's estranged son, Brian Christopher, to *Raw* in an attempt to further humiliate his broadcast partner. But there was little Lawler could do after the anonymous Raw general manager announced that he would be fired if he physically laid his hands on Cole.

Lawler challenged Cole to a match at WrestleMania. Cole initially declined, but then agreed on the condition that he could pick a personal trainer to be with him at ringside (Jack Swagger) and a hand-picked guest referee. A plan to bring in John Bradshaw Layfield to officiate the match, however, backfired, and "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin signed the contract to wear the stripes.

Lawler seemingly gained revenge by soundly defeating Cole at WrestleMania, forcing him to submit to an anklelock. But the Raw GM turned the tables afterward, awarding the match to Cole via disqualification because Austin had pushed Cole during the match.

[7] MIZ SUCCESSFULLY DEFENDS WWE TITLE VS. CENA AT 'MANIA

It could be said that The Miz defied his critics merely by making it to WWE, let alone attaining stardom after emerging from the realm of reality television. If he made it at all, no one could foresee him advancing much past the mid-card level.

But then ... it happened. The brash, cocky Cleveland native cashed in his Money in the Bank briefcase and dismantled an already-weakened Randy Orton to win the WWE championship in November 2010.

While some gave credit where it was certainly due, others immediately began to deride the sport's new kingpin. The general consensus seemed to be that The Miz may enjoy, at best, a few months with the title, but there was no way he would go on to defend the strap at WrestleMania 27.

As the months went by, however, The Miz tightened his grasp on the industry's biggest prize. He successfully defended the title against the likes of Orton, John Morrison, and a surprisingly game Jerry "The King" Lawler, setting up a showdown between himself and John Cena in Atlanta.

Going in, Cena was the heavy favorite. But a miscalculation in judgment on his part led to a double-countout. The match was then restarted by 'Mania host The Rock, who promptly leveled Cena with a Rock Bottom, allowing The Miz to steal the pinfall and retain his title.

Regardless of how it happened, it happened. The Miz also fell victim to The Rock in the aftermath, but he walked out of the Georgia Dome as the WWE champion. Against all odds.

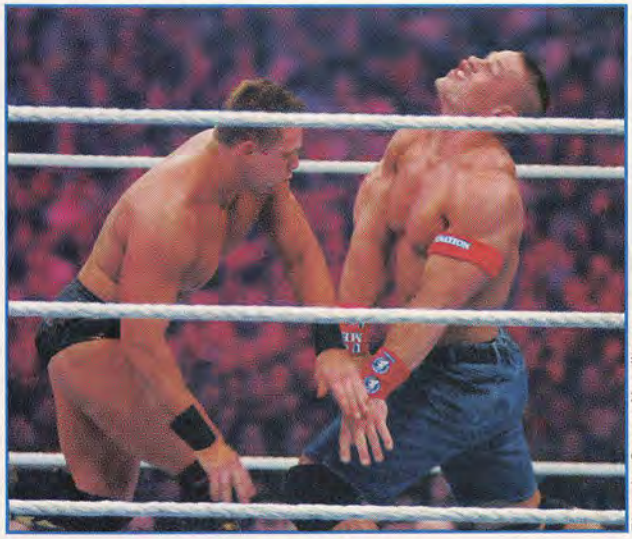


Photo by George Napolitano

[8] ROH PURCHASED BY SINCLAIR BROADCASTING GROUP

Five months after being dropped from HDnet, Ring of Honor announced that it was being purchased by Maryland-based Sinclair Broadcast Group Inc., which operates 57 TV stations across the U.S.

"We are very excited about this acquisition," said Steve Marks, COO of Sinclair's Television Group. "Television and professional wrestling have a long history of successful partnerships and driving viewership. We believe that the powerful promotional platform that our TV stations provide, coupled with our 22 percent coverage of the U.S. TV households, will allow ROH to achieve name brand recognition and grow its share of the wrestling market. When you consider the make-up of our station mix and the number of CW, MYTV and FOX affiliates we operate, this is a perfect fit for our viewer demographics."

Come September, when ROH wrestling begins airing on Sinclair stations, Ring of Honor will become the only U.S. wrestling promotion with a multi-market presence on broadcast TV. However, ROH fans who do not live in a market with Sinclair stations will be able to watch ROH's show on the company's website. It is expected that Sinclair will seek to move Ring of Honor's taping location from Lexington, Kentucky, to a location closer to Baltimore, Maryland.

Sinclair's Joe Koff, who has experience in managing wrestling content, will head ROH for the broadcast company. Longtime promoter Gary Juster will be added as VP of Operations. Former ROH owner Carey Silkin is expected to remain with the promotion in an advisory role.

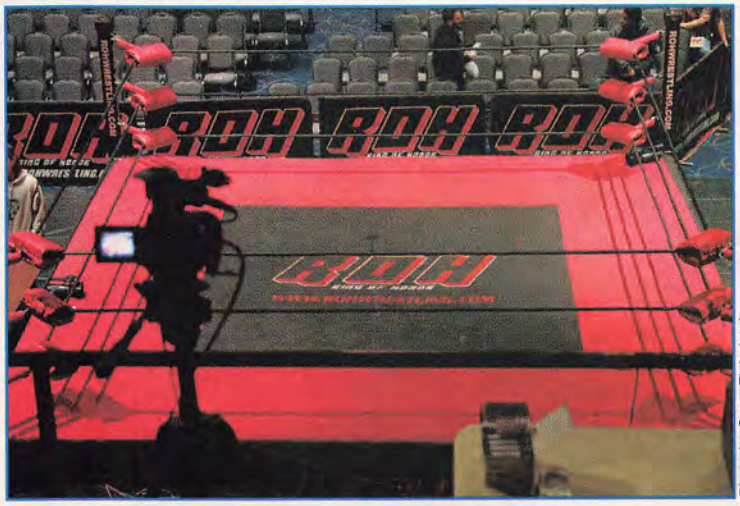


Photo by Scott Finkelstein

[9] ALBERTO DEL RIO WINS 2011 ROYAL RUMBLE

To come into WWE with as much fanfare and posturing as Alberto Del Rio did last year, it was natural to assume that the expectations were high for the veteran from Mexico.

Immediately setting his sights on the main-event competitors and world championship gold, Del Rio wasted no time making his intentions known while searching for the quickest path to stardom.

The 2011 Royal Rumble match marked the first time WWE would allow 40 entrants to all compete for a guaranteed shot at one of the two major championships at WrestleMania.

Although Del Rio was considered a strong competitor and worthy of some consideration as a favorite to win the event, no prior wrestler had ever emerged victorious during his first full year of employment with the company. Add to that the facts that Del Rio made virtually no friends during his early run on Smackdown's roster, and that there would be nine additional competitors gunning for him, and the odds of a Del Rio victory became even slimmer.

Photo by George Napolitano

Entering in the cushy 38th slot, Del Rio spent less than 10 minutes of actual time in combat on his way to victory (only prior victors Brock Lesnar and Edge spent less time in the ring). Del Rio made something of a statement to WWE's main-event wrestlers by eliminating Randy Orton late in the match.

Fans may have chafed at seeing the wildly popular "Viper" lose at the hands of the smug luchador, but the high-profile win cemented Del Rio's spot in the upper echelon of WWE. Perhaps it *was* Del Rio's destiny to become a WWE world champion.

[10] FORTUNE SPLITS FROM IMMORTAL, BECOME FAN FAVORITES

"They" just couldn't sit back and watch it happen. Fortune, consisting of TNA originals AJ Styles, Kazarian, and Beer Money Inc., had seen enough and were convinced that Hulk Hogan and Eric Bischoff, the leaders of the over-bloated Immortal faction, were running the company into the ground.

Ric Flair, the founder and mastermind behind Fortune, had originally orchestrated the merger between his charges and Immortal. The idea was that Hogan, Bischoff, and Flair would create a mega-stable that would claim every championship in TNA and ultimately control its destiny.

In Flair's absence at an *Impact* taping in late-January, Fortune interfered in a title match between TNA World champion Mr. Anderson and Immortal centerpiece Jeff Hardy, effectively splitting from the larger group. When Flair returned, he promised Hogan and Bischoff that he would convince Fortune to rejoin Immortal, but his attempts were unsuccessful.

Fortune pulled off a clean sweep at Victory Road, with Styles beating new Immortal member Matt Hardy (with Flair in his corner), Kazarian successfully defending his X division title in an Ultimate-X match, and Beer Money retaining the World tag team title against Ink Inc.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

On the following edition of *Impact*, Styles was injured when another new Immortal member, Bully Ray, powerbombed him off the entrance ramp and through a table. Christopher Daniels then made his return to TNA, aligning with Fortune and promising to get revenge on Immortal.

At Lockdown, Daniels, Kazarian, and Beer Money would defeat the Immortal contingent of Flair, Matt Hardy, Bully Ray, and Abyss in a brutal and bloody Lethal Lockdown match. Styles made his return during the match, aiding his team to victory. Afterward, Daniels was officially named a member of Fortune.

[11] DRAFT SENDS ORTON TO SMACKDOWN, DEL RIO TO RAW

The annual shakeup of the Raw and Smackdown brands produced few big surprises this year—save for the swerve that saw Cena drafted to Friday nights with the first pick, only to wind up back on Raw as the event's final selection.

But, the WWE Draft did once again serve its purpose of freshening up the rosters and filling holes where needed. This was particularly necessary for Smackdown, which in the absence of Edge was in need of a new main-event performer.

The blue brand also lost Rey Mysterio Jr., but it gained Raw's (and arguably the company's) number-two name in Randy Orton. Any question as to whether or not "The Viper" would be pushed immediately into the top spot was answered when he won the World title from Christian on his first night on *Smackdown*.

Alberto Del Rio, meanwhile, was the most notable name going from Smackdown to Raw. Along with his personal ring announcer, Ricardo Rodriguez, the Mexican aristocrat joined a rogues gallery of villains on Raw that also includes The Miz and CM Punk. All three immediately began jockeying for position as the top challenger to Cena's WWE championship.

Other relocations (including the supplemental draft held the following day) saw The Big Show, Jack Swagger, and Kofi Kingston head to Raw, while Sin Cara, Sheamus, Daniel Bryan, and Mark Henry landed on Smackdown.

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[12] HARDY GIVES TNA A BLACK EYE AT VICTORY ROAD

There have been bad main events before, even on heavily hyped pay-per-views. It happens, and though it's never excusable, sometimes conditions are beyond anyone's reasonable control.

That was not the case, however, at Victory Road. What happened went down instantly as one of the most embarrassing, regrettable incidents in wrestling history. And with it, Jeff Hardy continued to diminish his reputation.

The main event of the evening was scheduled to feature TNA World champion Sting defending the title against Hardy, the man he had taken the strap from in an impromptu match on *Impact* just two weeks prior. Hardy entered the arena first, and from the moment he stepped through the curtain, it was painfully obvious that there was something not right about him.

Hardy staggered and swayed, got into the ring and stumbled around aimlessly. Sting, upon arrival, was visibly angry. As the challenger continued to wander around, Eric Bischoff emerged from the back and tried to settle down the situation. Hardy was allowed to stay in the ring and the bell rang to start the match.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

After Hardy stalled for about a minute-and-a-half, Sting had had enough. The champion grabbed him, slapped on the Scorpion Death Drop, and wrapped him up for an easy 88-second win. The fans in attendance voiced their displeasure as a furious Sting stormed up the ramp shouting out to them, "I agree!"

Hardy, whose history of drug abuse and arrest had led many to question why TNA continued to put so much faith into him to begin with, was sent home from the *Impact* tapings the following week and written out of ongoing storylines. TNA issued an apology and offered six months of free access to the tnaondemand.com library to anyone who had purchased the show.

[13] STING RETURNS, WINS TNA WORLD TITLE

Every time 52-year-old Steve Borden thinks that he's out, TNA seems to pull him back in. His hand sufficiently calloused from passing the proverbial torch from one would-be successor to the next (none of whom end up ready to carry the promotion's mantle), Sting was once again called to action at a late-February *Impact* taping. Amid rumors that he was to sign with WWE, and with no fanfare preceding his return, Sting's comeback, and title victory, seemed to catch everybody off-guard.

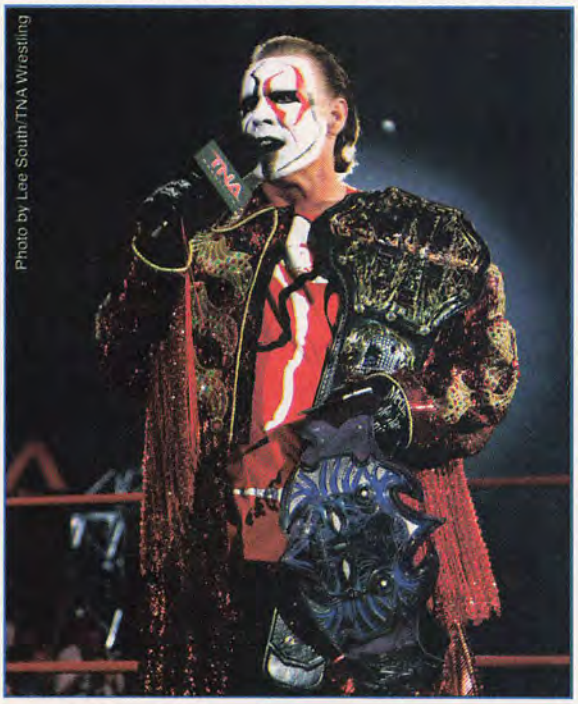
Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Unlikely as a third TNW World title reign may have seemed at the time, Sting's industry of choice is professional wrestling, so it should be remembered that anything is possible.

But even a veteran like Sting couldn't have predicted the position he'd be in a few weeks later at Victory Road, where he was scheduled to defend his title against Jeff Hardy.

In a match lasting a mere 88 seconds, Sting defended the TNA World championship against Hardy, who came to the arena impaired and was still permitted to compete.

While the promotion attempted to make amends to the paying customer, Sting stood proudly as champion and vowed to, once again, carry the company with the pride and tenacity of a fighting champion. The victory ushered in third run as TNA World champion for the oldest titlist in the strap's history.

[14] CHRISTIAN FINALLY WINS—THEN LOSES—THE WORLD TITLE

Christian had become a study in contrasts by the time he returned to WWE in 2009. Four years prior, at a point where he was closer to the pinnacle of individual success in WWE, he left the company and headed for TNA. Four years and two NWA World championship runs later, TNA's perennial main-eventer was headed back up to Stamford to, once again, begin the ascent to the top of the card.

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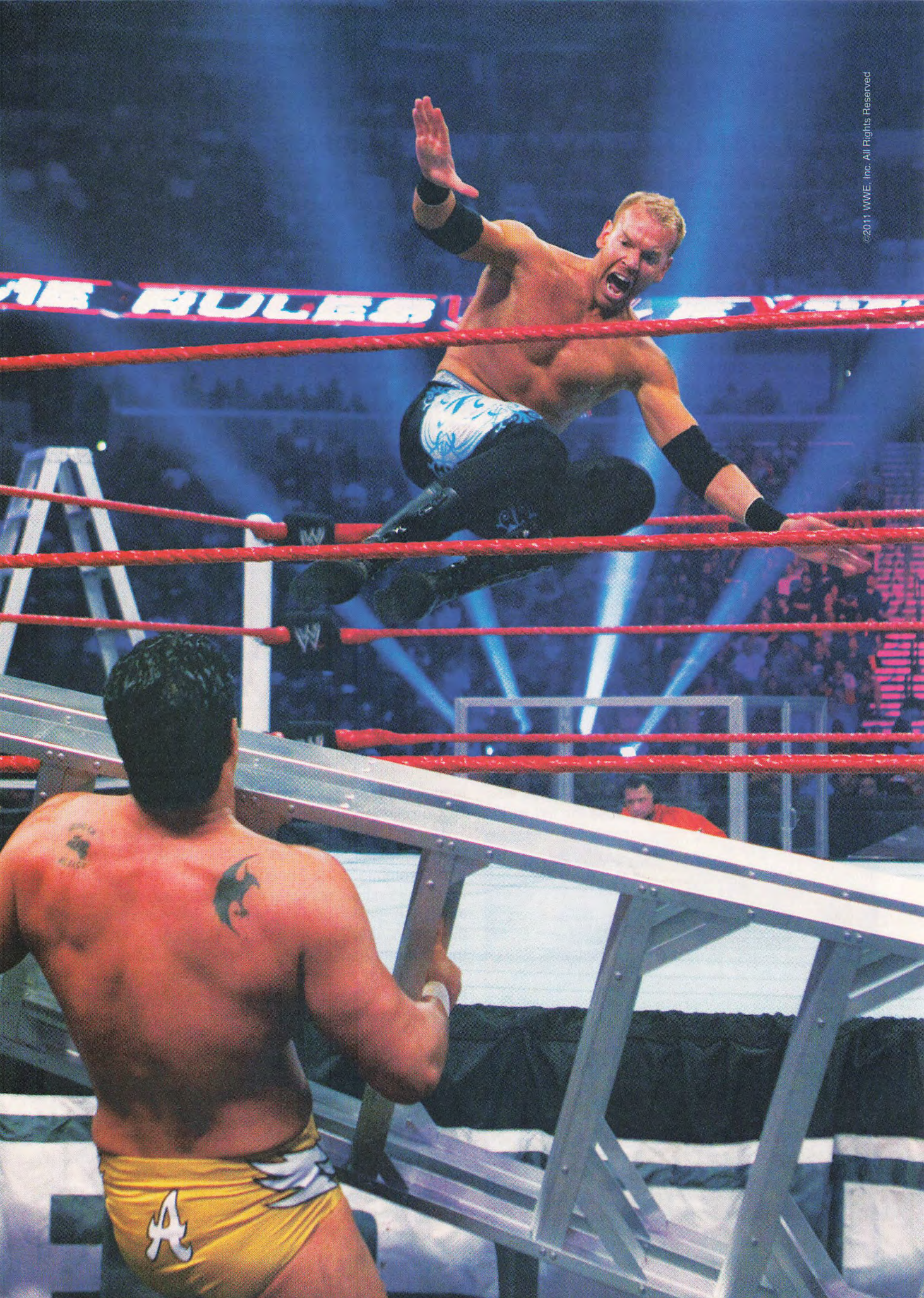
For the better portion of his second run in WWE, though, Christian was either enjoying modest success in the mid-card or tending to injuries, the most serious being a torn pectoral muscle he suffered at the hands of Alberto Del Rio in September 2010. Although the time away from the ring set him back a few months in his quest for championship gold, it must have also made his eventual victory all the sweeter.

With the World championship recently vacated by the surprise retirement of Edge, Christian fought his way to a battle royal victory on *Smackdown* and, thus, a shot at the vacant title in a match against then-number one contender Del Rio. With both a World title and revenge on the line, Christian captured the title in a ladder match at WWE's Extreme Rules pay-per-view in May.

The victory, albeit sweet, was short-lived. Nearly 48 hours later, Christian lost the title to Randy Orton during the taping of *Smackdown* that would air the following Friday. What was more than six years in the making ended up yielding a result that lasted less than two full days.



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[15] TRIPLE-H TO HEAD NEW WWE DEVELOPMENTAL INITIATIVE

By virtue of his marriage to Stephanie McMahon, Triple-H's influence both backstage and on the corporate level of WWE's day-to-day operation has long been a question of interest within the industry.

In 2010, Paul Levesque was formally given the title of "Executive Senior Advisor" to company chairman and CEO Vince McMahon, and began working out of his own office at WWE headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut. The exact details of his role behind the scenes, however, remained unclear.

So, too, did his future as an in-ring performer, especially after Triple-H suffered a torn biceps muscle at the hands of Sheamus and was forced out of action. He did not return for nearly a full year, coming back only to fall short in his bid to end The Undertaker's undefeated streak at WrestleMania 27.

It was subsequently revealed that HHH had been placed in charge of WWE's new talent initiative program, the focus of which is the recruitment, training, and character development of prospects throughout the world.

True to the international scope of his position, the first performer Triple-H was given credit for signing was Mexican mega-star Mistico, who was introduced at an elaborate Mexico City press conference in February and immediately transformed into Sin Cara.

WWE had sent overtures to Mistico in the past, so the precise role that Triple-H played in convincing him to come north is not known.

HHH is also said to have had influence in the casting decisions made for the first season of the reprised *Tough Enough* program, and is actively seeking to diversify the roster of WWE's developmental affiliate, Florida Championship Wrestling.

Photo by George Napolitano

He has his work cut out for him. It can be argued that the pipeline has not produced a legitimate star since John Cena and Randy Orton came out of the ranks of Ohio Valey Wrestling in the early-2000s.

[16] MICHAELS, ROAD WARRIORS HEADLINE 2011 WWE HOF CLASS

As has become a wonderful part of the WrestleMania weekend festivities over the years, WWE added nine new names to its Hall of Fame as members of the 2011 class. The event, held at the Philips Arena, was a sellout and drew legends from across the industry.

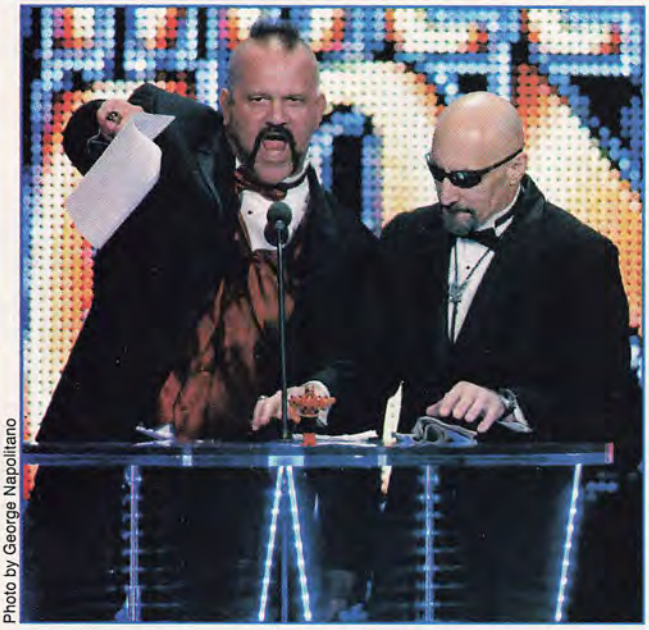
Photo by George Napolitano

Headlining the star-studded class of 2011 was recent WWE retiree and the man who has come to be known as "Mr. WrestleMania," Shawn Michaels. Inducted, naturally, by his longtime friend and former D-X running mate Triple-H.

Not to be outdone, fellow inductees The Road Warriors infused the evening with emotion as Animal and "Precious" Paul Ellering lauded fallen member Hawk during their acceptance speech. Despite enjoying their greatest team successes in promotions other than WWF/WWE, The Legion of Doom became only the seventh team to receive the honor of induction.

The roster of inductees was rounded out with legends, fan favorites, and a celebrity. They included: hardcore icon Abdullah the Butcher, perennial patriot "Hacksaw" Jim Duggan, family patriarch "Bullet" Bob Armstrong, alpha-Diva Sunny, and comedian Drew Carey.

In the weeks preceding the event, criticism rained down on WWE regarding the selection process as well as the inductees themselves. The common thread in the arguments made was that WWE was inducting a large portion of competitors who, like The Road Warriors, were better known for achieving success elsewhere.

[17] *TOUGH ENOUGH* RETURNS WITH AUSTIN AS HOST

At a time when it appeared WWE was systematically downsizing its television programming by moving *NXT* and *Superstars* to wwe.com, it seems more likely that it knew it had a winner in its back pocket with the revival of *Tough Enough*.

The original show that introduced the world to the likes of Chris Nowitzki, Matt Morgan, John Morrison, and The Miz was repackaged to combine the elements of reality television and wrestling. In hopes of satiating both groups of fans, the program was shot with ample drama, and hosted by WWE legend "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin. The trainers' cast was rounded out with notable names such as Booker T, Bill DeMott, and Trish Stratus before the April 4 debut.

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Fan anticipation built high throughout early-2011. With a desirable timeslot as the lead-in to *Raw* on Monday nights, an hour running time, and the backing of the USA Network, WWE clearly had big plans for the first of what it hoped would be many seasons of *Tough Enough*. The combination of star power and advertising paid off for WWE almost immediately.

Although ratings numbers in the 1.5-2.0 range may seem low, they were relatively strong given that *Raw* was bringing in a 3.0-3.5 figure during the same timeframe. Overall, critical response to the series was positive through the spring, spurring early discussions of a possible renewal for a second season.

[18] KURT-KAREN-JARRETT SOAP OPERA UNFOLDS IN TNA

Oftentimes, the most entertaining angles in professional wrestling are based upon real-life events that, with the cooperation of all parties involved, somehow make their way onto the TV screen.

With the advent of lightning-quick information-sharing, nothing seems sacred anymore in wrestling, nor is any personal story off-limits to a fan base with an unquenchable thirst for entertainment.

In January, the very well known—but not publicly promoted—issues between Kurt Angle, Karen Angle, and Jeff Jarrett crept into TNA broadcasting, eventually becoming a major angle on *Impact* throughout the spring. What started as a simple feud between Kurt and Jeff quickly drew in Karen, the Angle family, and millions of wrestling fans on a weekly basis.

As the feud progressed, it became very clear that nothing was going to be off-limits during the on-screen confrontations between the three. Allegations of infidelity and physicality gave way to Jarrett's proverbial victory lap over landing Kurt's ex-wife. Teetering on the edge of impropriety and downright uncomfortable to watch, nobody held back in his or her verbal or physical attacks.

By late-spring, with the feud seemingly running its course, a new face was added to the mix in order to prolong the battle and add a previously unforeseen twist, as a mistress from Kurt's past was referenced. Influenced by a series of mixed tag matches, many, including Karen, assumed that Velvet Sky, who served as Kurt's partner, was the mistress. But the Beautiful Person was innocent, and fans were flabbergasted when the mistress revealed herself weeks later to be Chyna.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

[19] CHRIS JERICHO COMPETES ON *DANCING WITH THE STARS*

Add celebrity dance contestant to the growing list of accomplishments for sometimes-wrestler—sometimes-rock star Chris Jericho. The tremendously popular dancing competition has thrived off of having a loyal national audience and colorful celebrities, and seemed like a natural fit for Jericho, who has looked to expand his brand image since his original departure from WWE in 2005.

Easily one of the more athletic members of the cast, Jericho was put in the early position to succeed on the program or, at the very least, go deep into the competition. Paired with Cheryl Burke—the only two-time winner—Jericho progressed weekly. Although his scores were not exemplary, Jericho managed to survive the first four weeks of eliminations and position his tandem as a prohibitive favorite.

Photo by Adam Taylor/ABC

In the end, Jericho was done in precisely by what the nation tunes in to see: his dancing. Despite enjoying widespread publicity among the wrestling industry as well as surprisingly well-organized campaigns among fans to encourage the vote, Jericho was sent packing in late-April.

Whether a fifth place finish in the competition will create the type of bump in name recognition Jericho may have hoped for remains to be seen. What it does ensure, however, is months of endless torment by friends and foes alike upon his inevitable return to WWE.

[20] MATT HARDY RECEIVES RELEASE FROM WWE, JOINS TNA

Sometimes, being overshadowed by your younger brother can actually be a good thing. Although Matt Hardy has wavered throughout his career between being both proud and jealous of all the attention Jeff received, both brothers have become lightning rods for controversy in recent years.

While Jeff was making headlines in TNA as both a major acquisition and headache, Matt's own personal drama was unfolding approximately 1,100 miles north. In a series of increasingly bizarre Internet posts and, yet again, cryptic messages, Matt voiced his frustration with the state of the industry.

At times both rambling and vicious, it became clear that Matt felt so disenfranchised with the way he was being used in WWE that even *he* believed he was not long for Stamford. In October 2010, Hardy was quietly released from his WWE contract and, almost immediately, the very web of bloggers and journalists that he skewered were abuzz with the countdown toward his inevitable debut with TNA.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Fans of the disgruntled North Carolinian did not have to wait much longer than the customary 90-day non-compete period for the re-emergence of their hero. Hardy made his TNA debut as the newest member of Immortal at the promotion's Genesis pay-per-view in January as the surprise opponent for then-number-one contender, Rob Van Dam.

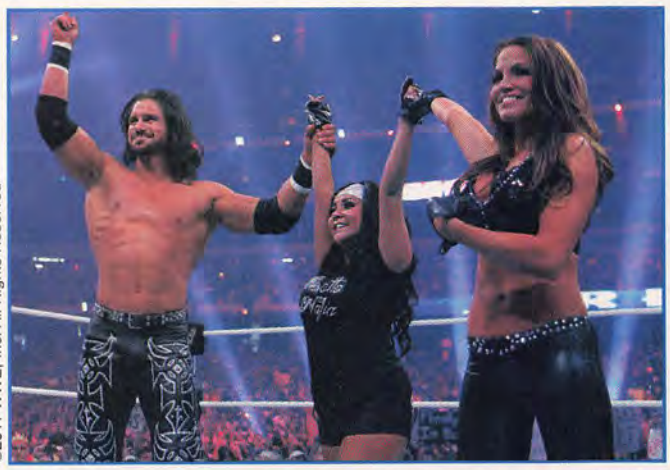
Since debuting with TNA, Hardy has been a primary member of the promotion's major storylines and had a shot at the TNA World championship, losing to Sting in April.

[21] SNOOKI MAKES HER WRESTLING DEBUT AT 'MANIA

Snooki-'Mania?

Not quite. But *The Jersey Shore* star made lots of headlines for agreeing to compete at WrestleMania. And, all things considered, she did quite well for herself.

On March 14, Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi served as guest host for *Raw*. Vickie Guerrero took umbrage to Snooki's presence and exchanged words with the reality television star backstage, leading Michelle McCool to confront Snooki at ringside later in the show. McCool shoved Snooki, who retaliated by yanking McCool off the ring apron and attacking Layla. Trish Stratus and John Morrison came to Snooki's rescue and ran off Lay-Cool, Guerrero, and Dolph Ziggler.



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An embarrassed Guerrero issued a challenge for a six-person tag match at WrestleMania, which Team Snooki quickly accepted. It proved to be a major tactical error on Guerrero's part.

The intergender trios match started off as a see-saw contest between McCool and Stratus, but quickly degenerated into a free-for-all. Stratus laid out Lay-Cool and Morrison stunned Ziggler with a Starship Pain. Stratus made the tag to Snooki, who blasted McCool with a well-executed handspring hip attack. She then dusted off a nifty move from her cheerleading days, performing a cartwheel into a big splash. Incredibly, Snooki scored the winning pinfall over McCool, one of the most decorated Divas of recent years.

Snooki's involvement with *Raw* and WrestleMania garnered widespread mainstream media attention for WWE, and was featured on *TMZ*, *People*, the Associated Press, and many more media outlets.

[22] OLIVER HUMPERDINK DIES

Sir Oliver Humperdink harbored no illusions about how he made it in wrestling.

"I guess I just had that look," Humperdink (real name John Sutton) said in the book *The Pro Wrestling Hall Of Fame: The Tag Teams* by Greg Oliver and Steven Johnson. "I'm the type of guy you can look at and hate instantly. I've been told that many, many times. I consider it a compliment."

Sutton started his pro wrestling career after working as an arena usher in Minneapolis. He picked up extra work during AWA shows, carrying ring jackets to the back, working security, and helping set up rings. In 1973, he began working as a manager in Montreal, adopting the Humperdink name and managing The Hollywood Blonds, Buddy Roberts, and Jerry Brown.

He eventually moved down to the Florida territory where he formed The House of Humperdink, an eclectic stable of heels. He would go on to manage the likes of Bruiser Brody, Abdullah the Butcher, Ox Baker, Jos LeDuc, Kevin Sullivan, and Greg Valentine—some of the most sadistic rulebreakers the sport had ever seen. With his flaming red hair, bulging eyes, and garish jackets, he was one of wrestling's most colorful managers.

After stints with the National Wrestling Alliance, he debuted in the WWF in grand fashion, winning the "Battle For Bam Bam" and beating Bobby Heenan, Jimmy Hart, and the rest of the company's top managers to earn the wrestling services of Bam Bam Bigelow. He eventually returned to the NWA. He adopted the name Big Daddy 'Dink and managed The New Freebirds before retiring in 1993.

In recent years, Humperdink stayed active on the nostalgia circuit and enjoyed visiting old friends and meeting his fans. He was diagnosed with bladder cancer in early-2011 and succumbed to pneumonia a short time later.

[23] JEFF HARDY BECOMES TWO-TIME TNA CHAMPION

Regardless of the self-made complications going on in his personal life, Jeff Hardy has usually found ways to deliver in the clutch in the ring. Many of his best performances have come in ladder matches. Perhaps it should not have been surprising, then, that Hardy defeated Mr. Anderson in a ladder match at the Against All Odds pay-per-view to come away with this second TNA World championship.

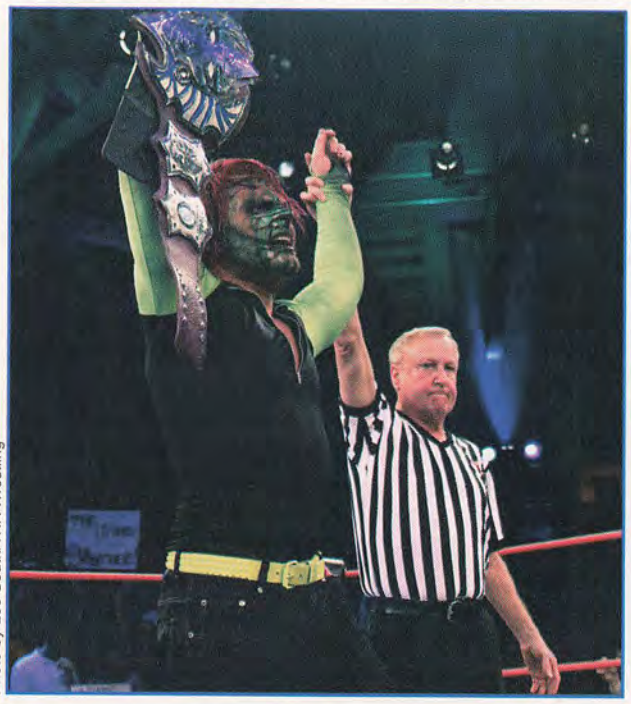

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Late in the match, Hardy and Anderson stood at the top of their respective ladders with the title belt within their extended grasps. Hardy bounced Anderson's head off the top of his ladder. Hardy grabbed for the strap, but Anderson had the presence of mind to swing the belt away from his challenger. Moments later, both men crashed hard to the mat, with Hardy trying unsuccessfully to grab the belt as he fell. Hardy recovered first, climbed the ladder, and claimed the belt and championship.

Despite Hardy's world-class talent, his most recent title win caught many observers off-guard. Hardy was not only dealing with a pending criminal trial in North Carolina, he was also involved in a maelstrom of controversy after allegedly nearly being pulled from the Final Resolution card. Considering the fact that Hardy had recently turned heel to join the Immortal faction, he was hardly at the height of his popularity when he opposed Anderson at Against All Odds.

[24] CM PUNK REPLACES WADE BARRETT AS LEADER OF NEXUS

Nearly from the time of its formation by the competitors on the first season of *NXT*, it became clear that the heel alliance was tenuous at best. As long as leader Wade Barrett could keep the others in line—and obeying his commands to group attack most every notable veteran on the WWE roster – the group remained united. But it seemed almost inevitable that the others would soon get tired of Barrett's tyrannical control and would split up either entirely or into smaller factions.

Sure enough, Barrett's grip on the group eventually slipped. Unexpectedly, the group reformed with a new leader in control, CM Punk. After the failure of his Straight Edge Society, Punk had pledged to focus solely on his own career when he returned to the ring from an injury that kept him sidelined for much of the latter portion of 2010. Instead, the guru-like Punk seized the opportunity to fill the power vacuum in Nexus and has been using the group members as his personal henchmen and enforcers ever since.

Barrett, meanwhile, landed on his feet and formed a new alliance, The Corre. To date, the group has not been nearly as successful in accomplishing its goals as the Barrett-led Nexus, but neither has Nexus under Punk's direction. The group shuffled the deck again after Wrestlemania 27, violently booting Ezekiel Jackson from its ranks.

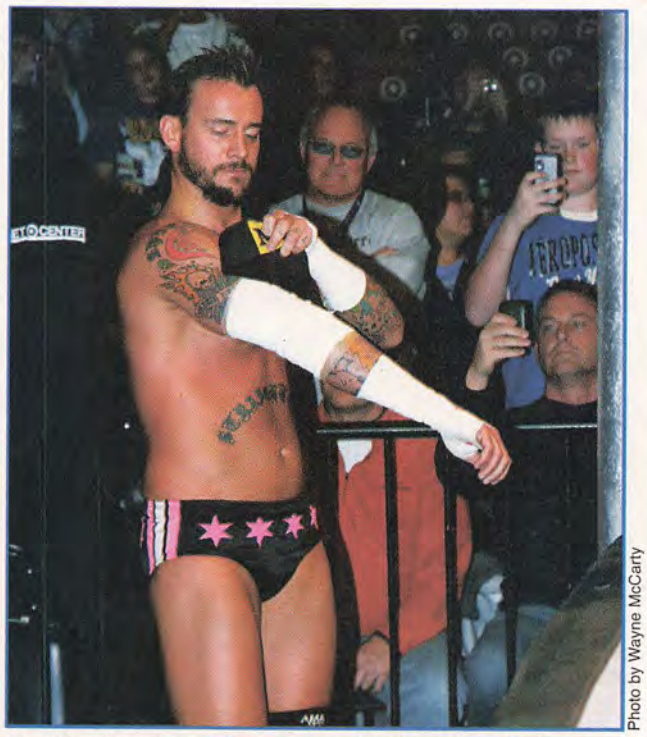

Photo by Wayne McCarty

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

[25] DIESEL, BOOKER T MAKE SURPRISE APPEARANCES AT RUMBLE

The Royal Rumble usually holds a surprise or two, and the 2011 Rumble included a couple of doozies as two former WWE world champions made their return.

The first surprise came as the 17th entrant was announced and Booker T made his way to the ring. Booker hit the ring with a surge of energy and a flurry of offense, and then hit his signature Spinnaroonie to the delight of the capacity crowd at the TD Garden in Boston. But just as "The Book" was hitting his stride, Mason Ryan dumped him over the top rope.

Though Booker was eliminated from the Rumble after just one minute of action, he later bounced back by scoring a color commentary gig on *Smackdown.*

Photo by George Napolitano

The next Rumble surprise was huge—as in, 6'11", 315 pounds. The 32nd entry was Kevin Nash himself, reprising his Diesel persona. The former WWE champion (and five-time WCW World champion) hit the ring to a thunderous ovation. Eliciting chants of "Let's go, Diesel!" the big man threw his signature elbows and punches, until Wade Barrett eliminated him after almost three minutes of action. As he walked to the back, Diesel had a brief stare-down with old WCW rival The Big Show in the aisle, prompting speculation that a rematch might be in the works.

Booker T and Diesel may not have made much of an impact in the Rumble match, but their appearance certainly sent shockwaves through TNA. Both Booker and Nash had been rumored to be part of a Main Event Mafia reunion.

[26] CENA, EDGE TRIUMPH IN ELIMINATION CHAMBER

The WWE World championship and the top contendership for the WWE heavyweight title were at stake in separate Elimination Chamber matches on February 20 in Oakland, California.

The Raw Elimination Chamber bout featured John Cena, CM Punk, Sheamus, Randy Orton, John Morrison, and R-Truth, with the winner earning a WrestleMania title shot against WWE champion The Miz. R-Truth was the first man eliminated, courtesy of a big Brogue Kick by Sheamus, followed by Randy Orton, who fell victim to a Go To Sleep from Punk. Morrison showcased his athleticism and agility by scaling the cage and dropping onto Sheamus to eliminate the Irishman, but the "Shaman Of Sexy" fell victim to a Cena Attitude Adjustment. In the end, Cena caught Punk with an Attitude Adjustment to score the win, earning a title shot against The Miz at WrestleMania.

The participants in the Smackdown Chamber match were World champion Edge, Kane, Rey Mysterio, Wade Barrett, Drew McIntyre, and The Big Show, who was revealed as the mystery competitor, replacing Dolph Ziggler. After an intense opening that saw several competitors get thrown through the glass pods, The Big Show scored the first elimination, ending Barrett's night with a knockout punch. Show was the next man out, after a gang-up by the rest of the participants, followed by McIntyre, courtesy of a Kane chokeslam. Edge caught Kane with a big spear for the elimination, leaving the champion alone with Mysterio. After a back-and-forth exchange, Edge caught Mysterio with a spear in mid-air, which was enough for him to take the win and successfully retain the championship.

[27] EDDIE EDWARDS WINS ROH TITLE

Best known for his remarkable tag team chemistry with American Wolves partner Davey Richards, Eddie Edwards took a major step in his solo career when he won the Survival of the Fittest tournament to capture his first Ring of Honor heavyweight championship. In so doing, Edwards became the first Triple Crown winner in ROH, having previously won the tag team championship with Richards as well as the TV championship.

In the finals of the Survival of the Fittest tourney, Edwards took on defending champion Roderick Strong and ended Strong's six-month reign atop ROH. For nearly 30 minutes, the two competitors exchanged heavy strikes, chops, and kicks that drew gasps from the crowd at the Manhattan Center. Strong took control of much of the latter part of the match. Finally, Edwards reversed a Stronghold into a successful pin attempt.

Edwards' somewhat unexpected win over Strong immediately did wonders for his name recognition level beyond diehard ROH devotees. In the hours following the title change, Edwards' name even broke into the top trending search terms on Twitter—something very common for WWE and select TNA wrestlers, but rare for anyone in the smaller promotions. Edwards then followed up the win against Strong by breaking a personal losing streak against Christopher Daniels in a pair of impressive title defenses.

It is fair to say that Edwards has arrived as a major force in the Ring of Honor singles ranks. It's equally fair to say that he has some tough acts to follow given the legacies of many previous ROH champions.

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

[28] TANAHASHI BEATS KOJIMA FOR IWGP TITLE

This Wrestle Kingdom V bout for New Japan Pro Wrestling's IWGP heavyweight championship pitted the master of the lariat against a challenger with one of the most impressive frog splashes in wrestling. Both champion Satoshi Kojima and challenger Hiroshi Tanahashi were hell-bent on winning the match with their signature move as a matter of pride and honor.

The match, which took place on January 4 at the Tokyo Dome, opened slowly, with Kojima and Tanahashi exchanging side headlocks, takedowns, and counters. After a feeling-out period, the match intensified, with Tanahashi unloading kicks and elbow strikes and Kojima responding with high-impact power moves.

Tanahashi clearly had Kojima well-scouted, deftly avoiding Kojima's vaunted lariat several times. Tanahashi—an agile wrestler who has been the called "The Japanese Shawn Michaels" —connected with a frog splash, but Kojima raised his knees when Tanhashi attempted the move a second time. After again countering the lariat, Tanahashi hit a second frog splash for a two-count.

Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

Kojima retaliated with a brutal lariat as Tanahashi stood on the apron, dropping the challenger to the arena floor. Kojima brought Tanahashi back into the ring with a brainbuster, then signaled for the lariat as the coup de grace. Tanahashi managed to duck the blow and hit a pair of dragon suplexes. Tanahashi pounced to the top rope and floored Kojima with a flying bodypress, then went back to the top rope and connected with a frog splash for the pinfall at the 21:35 mark.

With the win, Tanahashi captured his fifth IWGP heavyweight title and gave New Japan a viable Match of the Year contender for 2011.

[29] McCOOL LOSES TO LAYLA, ANNOUNCES HER RETIREMENT

For nearly two years, Michelle McCool and Layla have been united as Lay-Cool, a couple of mean girls who have thoroughly enjoyed tormenting the rest of the WWE Divas for their so-called imperfections. As BFFs, they even co-held the Divas championship, and successfully retained that championship against a variety of contenders.

For months, McCool relied on Layla for her interference and abilities to distract referees, but as Layla continued to improve as a credible wrestler in her own right, signs of dissension began to show. After a series of losses, Lay-Cool announced they were attending "couples therapy." After McCool and Layla had a heart-to-heart with a mediator, it looked like the women had patched up their differences. Later, however, McCool attacked her partner. And, finally, on the April 25 edition of *Raw*, Layla reached her limit. After losing a match to Eve Torres (due to botched interference from McCool), Layla snapped and attacked McCool.

Layla challenged Michelle to a no-disqualification, loser-leaves-WWE match at Extreme Rules. Michelle accepted. As the bell sounded for the match, McCool attacked her former protégé, and the 2010 *PWI* Woman of the Year took control. McCool dominated Layla, and then connected with her Faith Breaker finisher. But McCool made a sloppy cover, allowing Layla to kick out and later surprise her with a crucifix to score the upset victory. Adding injury to insult, McCool was then victimized by Kharma, who made her WWE debut by flattening McCool with an Implant Buster.

Honoring the match stipulation, McCool announced her retirement from the sport.

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[30] JOHNNY CURTIS WINS SEASON FOUR OF *NXT*

Even by the loose standards that WWE uses to define those who have competed on *NXT* as "rookies," it was a stretch to try to pass off 12-year veteran Johnny Curtis as a greenhorn. Originally trained by the late Killer Kowalski, Curtis made his pro debut in 1999. He was a regular on the independent scene for years and was part of the WWE development system for nearly five years, first with former satellite promotion Deep South Wrestling and then with Florida Championship Wrestling.

In many ways, Curtis was the odds-on favorite to win Season Four of *NXT*. Size is still a big plus in WWE, and Curtis combines aerial ability with a well-knit 6'4", 240-pound frame. Moreover, with Curtis having collected several singles and tag team titles both in the indies and FCW, he would be able to call on plenty of big-match experience.

Photo by Wayne McCarty

With R-Truth as his mentor, Curtis started the competition with a clean win over Jacob Novak. The following week, Curtis recorded the fastest time in the obstacle course challenge, earning points toward immunity from elimination. After winning both the Power of the Punch challenge and a talent contest, Curtis had the most immunity points. During the season finale on March 1, Curtis was declared the winner of *NXT*, defeating the monstrous Brodus Clay (who actually had the best in-ring record of any of the competitors at 7-3).

[31] AMAZING KONG DEBUTS IN WWE

The women of the Divas division understood the word "fear" the moment Kharma signed a WWE contract.

The two-time TNA Knockouts champion (as Awesome Kong) signed with WWE in late-December 2010, but it wasn't until April that the bruising 277-pounder began to make her presence known. Over the course of several weeks, she appeared in shadowy vignettes, destroying dolls and cackling with sadistic glee.

At Extreme Rules, Kharma made her long-awaited debut, attacking Michelle McCool following McCool's loss to Layla in a loser-leaves-WWE match. The next night on *Raw*, Kong charged to the ring and flattened Maryse with an Impact Buster. She glared at Kelly Kelly, who was frozen with fear, then turned and walked away, laughing to herself.

Kong's arrival in WWE set the stage for a potential facelift of the women's division. Kharma didn't join WWE after modeling swimsuits or posing for pin-ups. She graduated from the All Japan dojo and had left a trail of battered and bloodied victims all over the globe.

Kharma's debut in WWE was celebrated by female wrestling purists who anticipated "dream match" clashes against Beth Phoenix and Natalya, as well as the potential revival of the Kong-Gail Kim rivalry that heated up TNA in 2007-08. A powerhouse with a vicious backfist strike and a bad attitude, Kharma made an instantaneous impact on the Divas division, especially as she sought out pretty new dollies to mangle.

However, before Kharma appeared in her first official match with WWE, she announced on *Raw* that she was pregnant and forbidden by her doctor to engage in any physical activity.

[32] GUERRERO AWARDS ZIGGLER WORLD TITLE IN CONTROVERSIAL DECISION

At the Royal Rumble, Dolph Ziggler pushed Edge to the limit, but even with Edge's spear banned, courtesy of Smackdown acting General Manager Vickie Guerrero, "The Rated R Superstar" still managed to win the match and retain the championship. That setback didn't derail Ziggler's march toward the world title, however, as he and his girlfriend cooked up a scheme to rob Edge of his championship.

On the February 11th edition of *Smackdown*, Guerrero set up a rematch and again barred Edge from using his spear finisher. In the heat of the bout, Edge instinctively used his spear and scored the pinfall victory. The following week on *Raw*, Guerrero declared that she was stripping Edge of the championship for violating the ban.

On the February 18th edition of *Smackdown*, Guerrero jubilantly announced that she was naming Ziggler the new World champion and that she was firing Edge, claiming Edge was responsible for the mysterious attack that sidelined Smackdown GM Theodore Long.

But before Ziggler and Guerrero could celebrate their "victory," Long made a surprise appearance and interrupted the coronation ceremony. Long explained that it wasn't been Edge that had attacked him; it was Ziggler.

Long then announced a match between "new champion" Ziggler and Edge. Edge quickly countered a Zig-Zag attempt and connected with a spear to regain the championship, ending Ziggler's "reign" at just 11 minutes and 23 seconds. To add insult to injury, Long then proceeded to fire Ziggler from Smackdown.

Because Edge was never pinned or made to submit, PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED does not officially recognize Ziggler's title reign.

[33] LARRY SWEENEY COMMITS SUICIDE

The wrestling world has suffered dozens of tragedies over the past few decades, mourning the deaths of far too many of its own who have passed away at young ages. Better known to fans as wrestler and manager Larry Sweeney, 30-year-old Alex Whybrow became the latest casualty when he was found dead of an apparent suicide. His body was found after he hanged himself at a wrestling school in Lake Charles, Louisiana. He leaves behind his parents and two siblings.

Sweeney suffered from a particularly debilitating form of bipolar disorder. He had a severe mental breakdown in 2009, which he subsequently described as "the absolute worst event" of his life. He took time away from the ring to undergo therapy and his recovery progressed to the point that he was able to work a handful of independent shows in 2010 while looking for full-time work outside the wrestling business.

A graduate of Oberlin College, Sweeney worked for a time prior to his wrestling career as a tutor for Kaplan, an educational assistance and standardized test preparation service.

Within the wrestling business, Sweeney was perhaps most famous for his stints as a wrestler in CHIKARA and a heel manager in Ring of Honor. In ROH, he headed the stable known as Sweet 'n' Sour Inc., consisting of Sweeney's charges Chris Hero, Sara Del Rey, Bobby Dempsey, and personal trainer Tank Toland. Sweeney also served as a commentator on ROH's first ipay-per-view event.

Photo by Joe Zanolle

Responding to the news of Sweeney's death, Hero posted on Twitter that his former compatriot was "a dedicated friend and an overwhelmingly talented performer."

[34] MEXICAN STANDOUT MISTICO DEBUTS IN WWE AS SIN CARA

Over the past dozen years, WWE has made major inroads in capturing market share among Latino fans. The acquisition of Rey Mysterio Jr. gave WWE its biggest crossover star among both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking fans in federation history. With Mysterio's WWE career seemingly winding down, the company has proactively planned its transition strategy, first with the acquisition of Alberto Del Rio (formerly Dos Caras Jr.) and Sin Cara (formerly Mistico).

Del Rio was a major lucha libre star in CMLL, but his popularity paled in comparison to Cara's. As Mistico in AAA, the masked man was arguably the top star in any Mexican promotion. The 28-year-old enjoyed a level of mainstream appeal in Mexico that rivaled that of John Cena in the U.S. Unlike Del Rio, WWE allowed Cara to immediately debut in WWE without first serving a developmental stint in Florida Championship Wrestling.

Both Del Rio and Cara underwent name changes upon their WWE arrival. But Sin Cara (Spanish for "Without Face") differs from Mistico in name only. He remains a heroic masked high-flyer. Del Rio, of course, underwent a complete character change, doffing his mask and going from longtime fan favorite to arrogant heel. What they have in common is the major push they've received.

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[35] COLT CABANA, THE SHEIK WIN NWA TITLE

For generations, the NWA World title was considered the most prestigious championship in wrestling. However, with the collapse of wrestling's territorial system and the rise of World Wrestling Entertainment, the National Wrestling Alliance has been forced to adapt and redefine itself in the changing landscape.

In the early-1990s, the NWA parted ways with World Championship Wrestling, and *PWI* stripped the championship of its world title designation. For the past 20 years—excluding a five-year span where the NWA title was recognized by TNA—the NWA title has been defended on the independent circuit. In recent years, active champions like Adam Pearce and Blue Demon Jr. have helped the NWA title regain some of its prestige and made it a coveted championship.

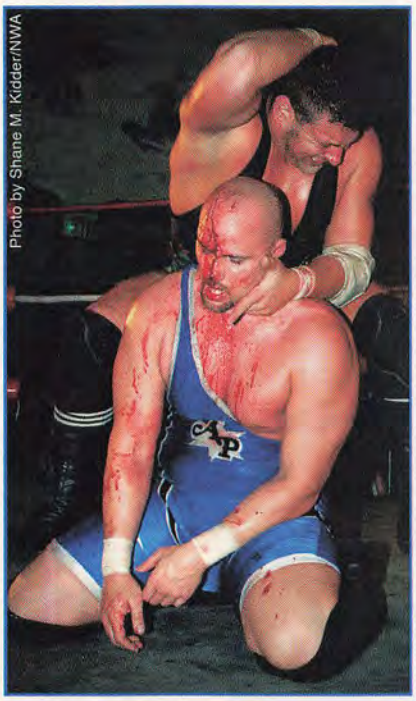
Photo by Shane M. Kidder/NWA

On March 6, Ring of Honor mainstay Colt Cabana defeated Pearce to win the NWA title in Hollywood, California, ending Pearce's third title reign just shy of the one-year mark. But Cabana's title run proved to be much shorter—shorter, in fact, than the much-maligned 1987 title reign of Ron Garvin. Cabana dropped the NWA title just 48 days later, losing the championship to The Sheik at a Pro Wrestling Fusion event in Jacksonville, Florida.

Though the NWA may not have the global prestige it once did, the NWA title is being actively defended all over the United States and internationally against standout competitors, just as it was in the old days.

[36] TEAM 3-D SPLITS, BEGINS BITTER FEUD

With more than 20 major tag team championships to its credit, Team 3-D can make a case for being wrestling's most successful tag team ever. But after having won every major championship in the game, brothers Ray and Devon were running out of goals to conquer. At Bound for Glory, the "Twin Brothers From Different Mothers" announced their impending retirement and issued a challenge to The Motor City Machine Guns for their final match.

Team 3-D and the Guns clashed at Turning Point 2010, with the Guns eking out a hard-fought win. The following week, Team 3-D appeared on *Impact* to announce their retirement. After a heartfelt speech, however, Ray blasted Devon in the back of the head, effectively ending a 14-year partnership.

Over the ensuing weeks, Ray (adopting the name Bully Ray) blamed Devon for being the "weak link" of Team 3-D. Ray defeated Devon by DQ at Genesis. After Bully Ray assaulted Devon's sons, Terrence and Terrell, a match was signed pitting Ray against Devon and his sons at Against All Odds. Ray won that match by handcuffing Devon to the ropes, then slamming one of Devon's sons through a table.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Devon and sons got the last laugh at Victory Road, when they interfered in a falls-count-anywhere match between Ray and Tommy Dreamer, allowing "The Innovator Of Violence" to score the win over his old ECW running buddy.

The Team 3-D feud proved to be one of the bloodiest and most intense feuds of the half-year, and helped springboard Bully Ray into the forefront as the newest—and most sadistic—member of Immortal.

[37] SHEAMUS DEFEATS BRYAN FOR U.S. TITLE

Winning a secondary title belt in WWE can either be a step up or a step down in a wrestler's career. When Daniel Bryan won the U.S. championship, many die-hard fans rejoiced. Virtually the antithesis of a typical "WWE Superstar," Bryan's ascension to championship status—even a secondary title—was hailed by many supporters as a grudging nod by WWE to the support the highly skilled but undersized Bryan has received within the locker room and among fans. Bryan's 176-day reign was the fourth longest in the history of the title.

Photo by George Napolitano

Sheamus ended Bryan's title reign on the March 14 edition of *Raw*, but it was not necessarily a boon to the Irishman's career. With a pair of WWE championships to his credit, Sheamus had been moved down from main-event status to upper-mid-card to the mid-card. Along the way, he endured a losing streak which saw him beaten cleanly on television by the likes of Mark Henry, Santino Marella, and Evan Bourne.

When Daniel's scheduled rematch with Sheamus at Wrestlemania 27 was bumped off the pay-per-view into dark match status—and quickly turned into a no-contest lumberjack match followed by a battle royal—it was largely a vote of no confidence in both men by Vince McMahon.

Although Sheamus' slide has been halted somewhat since WrestleMania, he still has a way to go to work his way back into the main-event picture. His U.S. title reign lasted 48 days, losing the championship to Kofi Kingston in a tables match at Extreme Rules. Bryan, meanwhile, has lost repeatedly to Sheamus at house shows as well as on the May 6 edition of *Smackdown*.

[38] HAAS & BENJAMIN WIN ROH TAG TITLE

Former WWE wrestlers Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas are no strangers to teaming with one another. As members of Team Angle in WWE, the duo dubbed their partnership "The World's Greatest Tag Team" and came pretty close to living up to their boastful moniker. They won a pair of championships together and despite WWE chairman Vince McMahon's notorious disdain for tag teams, established themselves as one of the most impressive and credible duos competing in any federation in the world.

By the time Benjamin and Haas reunited as a team in Ring of Honor, nearly three years had passed since the last time they had worked together. But the passage of time did little to disrupt their strong chemistry in the ring, and the team came closer and closer to winning the ROH tag team championship late last year and in early-2011.

In the main event of ROH's 9th Anniversary Show, Haas and Benjamin defeated The Briscoe Brothers to earn another title shot at the Kings of Wrestling, Chris Hero and Claudio Castagnol. Finally, on April 1, at the Honor Takes Center Stage card in Atlanta during WrestleMania weekend, the duo defeated Hero and Castagnoli to capture the tag title. The Kings of Wrestling had reigned for 363 days, the longest title run to date in ROH history.

Photo by George Tahinos

[39] EAGLES TOPPLES TOP CONTENDERS

During the SHIMMER DVD tapings for Volumes 37-40 on March 26-27, SHIMMER champion Madison Eagles made a strong case for consideration for the top spot in the 2011 "*PWI* Female 50" by scoring clean pinfall wins over MsChif, Mercedes Martinez, and Ayoko Hamada.

The Australian export made international headlines in 2010 when she unseated MsChif to win the SHIMMER championship. Since then, Eagles has relocated to the United States and has been actively competing throughout the country. Though lauded for her technical acumen and gritty toughness, some critics wondered if the win over MsChif was a fluke and how the Aussie would fare against elite competition, particularly after the competition had gotten an opportunity to scout her. Some naysayers pegged her as a transitional champion and predicted she would drop the title in one of her first title defenses.

Eagles silenced all of her critics with an incredible performance during the DVD tapings. On March 27, Eagles defended the title against former champion MsChif. Once again, Eagles was able to secure the victory after connecting with her Hellbound Death Valley driver finisher.

Just hours later, Eagles put her championship on the line once again, facing Martinez, the reigning Women Superstars Uncensored champion. After a blistering battle, Eagles once again emerged victorious.

Photo by George Tahinos

On March 28, Eagles put the SHIMMER championship on the line once again, this time against former TNA Knockouts tag team champion Hamada. Eagles managed to survive Hamada's stiff offense and once again secured the victory, courtesy of the Hellbound.

It was a weekend of masterful performances against three of the top females on the independent circuit, and it firmly established Eagles as the woman to beat in the indies today.

[40] MICKIE JAMES WINS KNOCKOUTS TITLE

Mickie James debuted in TNA in October 2010. If the six-time former WWE Divas champion and burgeoning country music recording artist thought winning the TNA Knockouts title would be a cakewalk, she was in for a rude awakening.

Before James could get her hands on Knockouts champion Madison Rayne, she had to go through Rayne's enforcer, Tara. James and Tara feuded through the winter of 2010-11, with Tara defeating James in a wild falls-count-anywhere match at Final Resolution and James avenging that loss by winning an intense steel cage match on *Impact*.

Rayne successfully defended the Knockouts title with wins over James at Genesis and Against All Odds, thanks both times to interference from Tara. But the wins over James caused Rayne's ego to swell to gigantic proportions. Dubbing herself the "Queen Bee Of TNA," Rayne declared herself to be the greatest Knockouts champion of all-time and began berating Tara for several imagined slights.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

As Rayne grew more and more narcissistic, James was preparing for a rematch. James challenged Rayne for a match at Lockdown. Rayne accepted, with the stipulation that James would have to have her head shaved if she lost. James accepted the stipulation and the match was signed.

But Rayne had another trick up her sleeve. She and Tara attacked James and ran over her left shoulder with Tara's motorcycle. James entered the match with a separated shoulder, putting her at a distinct disadvantage. However, the steel cage kept Tara outside the ring and unable to interfere. For once, James had a clean opportunity to relieve Rayne of the title.

Mickie needed just 36 seconds to hit a leaping DDT to pin Rayne and collect her first Knockouts championship.

[41] CHRISTOPHER DANIELS WINS ROH TV TITLE

Before making a surprise return to TNA and joining the Fortune faction, Christopher Daniels defeated Eddie Edwards to win the Ring of Honor TV championship. Over the course of the first half of 2011, Daniels had continued to work for both companies, and still held the ROH TV title as of press time.

At ROH's 9th Anniversary Show, Daniels and Edwards wrestled a 30-minute best-of-three falls match. The bout went to a time-limit draw, but Daniels earned the right to challenge Roderick Strong for the ROH championship based on leading Edwards one fall to none at the time their match ended. After a successful TV title defense against Mike "The Prodigy" Bennett, Daniels set his sights on Strong.

Displaying increasingly heelish behavior, Daniels stole the "Book Of Truth" from Strong's manager, Truth Martini, in order to better prepare for the match. In the meantime, Edwards beat Strong for the company's biggest championship. A frustrated Daniels lost to Edwards at Honor Takes Center Stage, ending a personal winning streak against the new champion, and refused to shake hands afterward. The following day, Daniels joined with Martini, Strong, and Michael Elgin to attack fan favorite El Generico.

Photo by Pamela Barnett

It is not known how much longer Daniels' current ROH stint will last. TNA allows its wrestlers to fulfill outside commitments that do not conflict with *Impact* tapings, pay-per-views, and house show tours. However, from a practical standpoint, it is tough to keep up such a schedule for a long period of time.

[42] BIG SHOW, KANE WIN WWE TAG TEAM TITLE

It's difficult to imagine men of such substantial girth not bumping into each other as both wandered relatively aimlessly through the beginning of 2011. Each, at points, seemed poised to make viable runs at the world championship of their respective brands, yet neither ended up doing so. It wasn't until March that a reunion of the largest former World tag team champs seemed inevitable.

During a match between the two on the March 4 *Smackdown*, The Corre interfered on behalf of Kane, who subsequently changed his perspective and turned against Wade Barrett's group. From that point moving forward, Kane and The Big Show unofficially had each other's backs while not officially reuniting as a tag team.

The pairing continued to hunt down and impede The Corre at every available opportunity. Through WrestleMania 27 and into the early-spring, Kane and The Big Show feuded bitterly with all four members of The Corre before finally setting their primary focus on taking away the championship gold held by Heath Slater and Justin Gabriel.

On the April 22 *Smackdown*, the world's largest tag team at 808 pounds, won the gold for the second time.

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Photo by Duane Long

[43] TOMMASO CIAMPA FINALLY WINS THE SUPER 8

There may not be a lot of money to be made on the independent wrestling circuit, but respect is a priceless commodity, and there isn't a better way to earn it as an indy than to win ECWA's Super 8 tournament.

Having finished as runner-up in both the 2009 and 2010 tournaments, Tommaso Ciampa seemed like a long-shot to reach a third straight final match, let alone finally capture the trophy. In fact, Ciampa nearly didn't make it through the first round, escaping with a hard-fought pinfall victory over the tenacious Rich Swann of Philadelphia.

Each victory of the tournament was a study of Ciampa's preparation and ability, as he finished off international grappler Shiima Xion, and then CZW product Adam Cole in the final round.

With his history-making victory, Ciampa joins a long list of respected former winners such as Christopher Daniels, Paul London, Petey Williams and Jerry Lynn. The event will always be remembered as being the night Ciampa conquered the ghosts of past losses. Most importantly, he earned the respect of all those who questioned his ability to perform in the clutch.

Photo by George Tahinos

[44] WINTER PUTS LOVE UNDER SPELL; BREAKS UP BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

At first, Winter was visible only to Angelina Love (and the entire viewing audience!), appearing to Angelina during backstage vignettes when her Beautiful People partner, Velvet Sky, wasn't around. Within a few weeks after Winter's arrival in the fall of 2010, however, Velvet realized that Winter was all too real … and her hold over Angelina was downright chilling.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Cold and calculating, the former Katie Lea Burchill found ways to come between Angelina and Velvet. By the start of 2011, Winter and Angelina were the Knockouts tag team champions and Velvet was frozen out of her best friend's life. Angelina almost seemed hypnotized, and Velvet alleged that Winter was drugging her. Although Winter and Angelina lost the Knockouts tag team title to Sarita and Rosita at Victory Road, Winter tightened her grip over Angelina, later preventing her from rescuing Velvet during a two-on-one attack by the new champs. When Angelina and Velvet actually teamed together to face the Mexico America duo on the March 24 edition of *Impact*, Angelina abandoned Velvet, allowing her to get pinned.

The creepy vixen's influence made Angelina more formidable in the ring, as she forced Velvet into submission on the April 28 *Impact*. On the following week's show, Velvet teamed with Kurt Angle to defeat Angelina, Winter, and Jeff Jarrett in a mixed handicap tag team match.

[45] TIM STORM DECLARED TRUE INDY "WORLD" CHAMPION

Wins and losses didn't matter. The format was more like *Dancing With The Stars* than professional wrestling. But those in attendance would agree that these matches were more competitive than anything seen in WWE or TNA.

And an obscure southern indy wrestler named Tim Storm won the 32-man Germanfest Wringenmeisterschaft Tournament. In German, the W-word means "wrestle champion."

Okay, now you're completely lost. Promoter Johnny Mantell and his company, Wild West Wrestling, spearheaded the effort to bring some of the world's greatest independent wrestlers to the annual Germanfest Festival in Muenster, Texas, from April 29 to May 1. The final bracketing consisted of 32 performers.

Mantell also recruited true wrestling experts to evaluate each in-ring performance and decide which wrestlers would advance in the tourney. At various times, these judges included Harley Race, Stan Hansen, Jake Roberts, Mando Guerrero, Chavo Guerrero Sr., Awesome Kong, Tugboat Taylor, Iceman Parsons, Col. Buck Robley, Chris Youngblood, Pro Wrestling NOAH General Manager Ryu Nakada, and head referee James Beard.

Storm had standout matches against Jeremy Young and Jason Jones en route to his tournament final against Tokyo Monster Kahagas, who had already impressed the judges against veteran Chaz Taylor and Kevin Douglas. In the end, most of the judges thought Storm was ever-so-slightly better than Kahagas.

Afterward, Storm was awarded a championship belt large enough to contain the word "wringenmeisterschaft."

Photo by Staci Brown

[46] KOFI KINGSTON BEATS SHEAMUS FOR U.S. TITLE

People were saying that Kofi Kingston was too soft. He was too nice to the fans. Some were even whispering that he'd already seen his best days in WWE. On May 1 at Extreme Rules, Kingston proved he was still relevant—and that his career was doing just fine—when he beat Sheamus for the U.S. title in a tables match.

It was a unique situation for both men, with Kingston sent to Raw and Sheamus sent to Smackdown as part of the WWE talent draft on April 26. The result was that Raw now lacked a secondary championship. Kingston's mission was to bring the U.S. title back to the flagship brand.

The Ghana native seized the momentum by flipping out of Sheamus' powerslam attempt onto a table and sending the champ into the table instead. Sheamus ducked a Kingston dive and went for the Celtic Cross, only to have his challenger escape. Both men were wily in their avoidance of the table, with Kingston taking a Brogue Kick and Sheamus getting nailed with the Trouble in Paradise—but each combatant shifted his weight to avoid seeing his aspirations end up in a heap of splintered wood.

In the end, Kingston caught Sheamus with a Boom Drop off the top rope, sending the soon-to-be ex-champ through a table. Kingston was declared the winner.

Kingston had previously enjoyed a four-month U.S. title reign in 2009, having defeated Montel Vontavious Porter for the red, white, and blue strap in June and losing it to The Miz in October.

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[47] CHYNA MAKES IN-RING RETURN IN TNA

Nearly 10 years after her high-profile run in WWE, Chyna returned to the wrestling spotlight at TNA's Sacrifice pay-per-view, teaming with Kurt Angle to face his ex-wife, Karen, and Karen's new husband, Jeff Jarrett.

Chyna came back at the May 3 taping of *Impact* by eliminating her old rival, Jarrett, whom she had defeated for the WWF Intercontinental title in a "Good Housekeeping" match back in 1999. That left Jeff and Karen with precious little time to prepare. Still, Chyna had a significant amount of ring rust, considering she hadn't been an active competitor in many years.

The Jarretts' strategy was simple: Keep Karen out of the ring. And, to do that, they had to prevent Kurt from making a legal tag to Chyna, which would automatically bring in Karen under mixed tag team match rules.

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

Wincing in pain after a mule kick from Jarrett, Angle crawled over to Chyna and finally made the tag. Chyna stormed the ring, executing a bodyslam and a suplex on Jarrett. Chyna splashed Karen in the corner, and she then applied an anklelock on Karen as Kurt clamped one on Jeff. The Jarretts tapped out simultaneously at 10-minute mark.

It was unclear whether Chyna would be a continuing presence in TNA because she hadn't signed a written contract with the company. Some insiders questioned the wisdom of utilizing Chyna, considering her well-documented history of drug abuse.

[48] NEW JAPAN TOURS THE U.S.A.

American puroresu enthusiasts were all aflutter when New Japan Pro Wrestling announced it would embark upon an unprecedented U.S. tour in May 2011. Jersey All-Pro Wrestling handled many of the promotional details, and, at the end of the three-day tour, most attendees agreed that the New Japan events had lived up to the hype.

What made the tour so special is that American standouts were able to mix it up with New Japan's greatest stars. Consider some of these clashes: Kenny Omega vs. Satoshi Kojima (opposite page), Charlie Haas and Rhino defeated Hiroshi Tanahashi and Togi Makabe, while Homicide (pictured) and Low-Ki beat Jushin Thunder Liger and Tiger Mask IV on the May 13 show in Rahway, New Jersey; Tanahashi successfully defended the IWGP heavyweight title against Haas, and junior heavyweight champ Prince Devitt beat Low-Ki, at the May 14 event in New York City; and Tanahashi beat Davey Richards at the Asylum Arena in Philadelphia on May 15.

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

The centerpiece of the tour, however, was the ongoing tournament to crown the first-ever IWGP Intercontinental champion. In first-round matches held in New Jersey, Yujiro Takahashi defeated Hideo Saito, Tetsuya Naito beat Josh Daniels, Toru Yano defeated Dan Maff, and Montel Vontavious Porter beat Kazuchika Okada. In the semifinals held in New York, Yano defeated Takahashi, and Porter beat Naito. The tournament final was held in Philadelphia, where MVP defeated Yano to become the first IWGP I-C champion. Interestingly, Porter won all three matches with his submission finisher, the TTB (Take it to the Bank) crossface.

Between 1,500 and 2,000 fans attended each of the events.

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

[49] ANDERSON, BEER MONEY WIN TITLES AT GENESIS

TNA kicked off the year with its Genesis pay-per-view, and it seemed those in charge were trying to make a statement about where the company would be headed in 2011, with Mr. Anderson and Beer Money Inc. capturing the World heavyweight and tag team championships.

Beer Money couldn't have had better opponents than World tag team champions The Motor City Machine Guns, although Chris Sabin couldn't have had a worse night. Storm spit beer in his face, Roode stunned him with a scintillating spinebuster, and, in the end, Alex Shelley mistakenly smacked him with a corner kick, enabling Roode to roll him up for a quick pinfall and earn Beer Money an unprecedented fourth TNA tag team title.

Mr. Anderson had an even more challenging evening, tasked with facing Matt Morgan to determine the top contender to Jeff Hardy's World title. Anderson employed an effective cat-and-mouse strategy against Morgan, easily ducking the seven-footer's clotheslines, striking and moving, and working over his left leg to weaken his ability to deliver his Carbon Footprint finisher. Anderson surprised Morgan with a small package to win the match.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Eric Bischoff rewarded Anderson by granting him an immediate shot at Hardy's World title. While the match was marred by an absurd amount of outside interference, with cameo appearances by Ric Flair, Mick Foley, Matt Hardy, and Rob Van Dam, Anderson managed to turn it into his moment, countering Jeff's Twist of Hate with a Mic Check to score the pinfall at the nine-minute mark.

[50] MIAMI NAMED AS LOCATION FOR WRESTLEMANIA 28

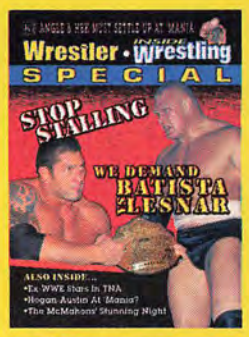
As is custom, the venue for the 2012 edition of WWE's flagship pay-per-view card was announced prior to the 2011 event. What made the announcement that Miami's Sun Life Stadium would host WrestleMania 28 all the more intriguing was that it immediately evoked one name in the minds of fans everywhere: The Rock.

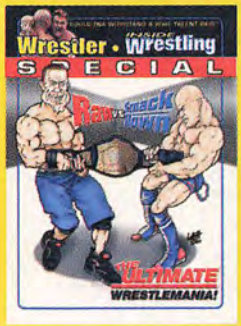
Of course, The Rock was used as the guest host of WM 27, which left fans wondering what role he could possibly fill at WM 28. A few weeks after WM 27, WWE announced that he and John Cena would headline next year's card.

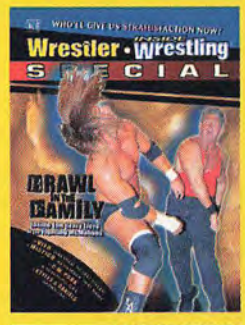
In February, WWE held a press conference in "The Magic City" to officially announce the event and begin the year-long lovefest with South Florida. Scheduled to take place on April 1, the event will be the first held in Sun Life Stadium after the primary spring residents, the Florida Marlins, move to the new facility.

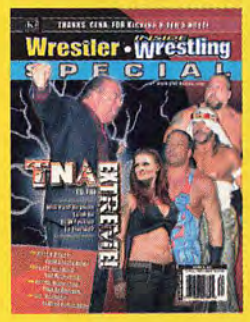
Photo Courtesy of Sun Life Stadium

WrestleMania 28 will mark only the second time in the storied history of the event that WWE has taken its biggest show to the Sunshine State. WrestleMania 24 was held at the Citrus Bowl in Orlando in 2008. The event, at that time, set the Citrus Bowl records for both attendance (74,635) and ticket sale revenue ($5.85-million U.S.). Given Miami's location and ability to squeeze a few more fans in the seats, it's already expected that 'Mania 28 will shatter the figures set in Orlando.









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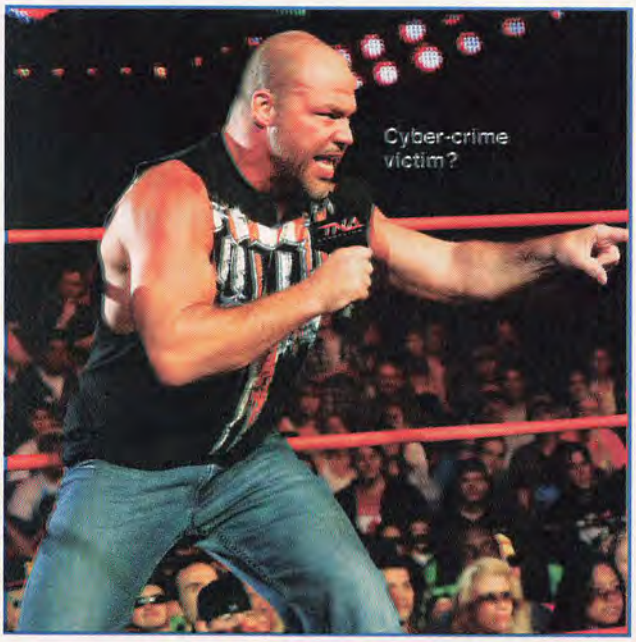

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

PRO WRESTLING (or sports entertainment, for that matter) isn't all five-star matches, star-studded supercards, and compelling drama. Sometimes, wrestlers—and wrestling companies—make some boneheaded decisions that leave people wondering, ***What were they thinking?***

There have been plenty of oddball stories in the first half of 2011. Here are a few of our favorites:

Back in the old days, a wrestler was likely to knock back a couple of cold ones with the boys after the matches. Today's wrestlers log on to Twitter and make dunderheaded comments for the entire world to read. Many wrestlers made twits of themselves on Twitter over the first half of 2011, but the biggest may have been **Kurt Angle**. Angle posted a series of tweets after WrestleMania, criticizing **Randy Orton**, **Jerry Lawler**, and **Jack Swagger** for using "his" moves, such as the Olympic Slam and the anklelock. "WWE really stuck it to me. No love lost. I'm glad that I helped your biggest event of the year," Angle wrote.

After his comments spread online, Angle claimed that someone had hacked his account, and that he did not make those statements. **CM Punk**, for one, wasn't having it.

"My Twitter account was hacked is the new: 'I'm a sloppy drunk [expletive],'" Punk tweeted, referencing Angle's arrest for suspicion of driving under the influence.

Hulk Hogan (who has also claimed his Twitter account had been hacked in the past) also made some controversial comments on the social network. Regarding **Edge's** retirement, Hogan took an apparent shot at him, writing "Me, **Flair**, **Hardy**, **Andre**, **AA**, **Blanchard**, **Orndorff**, **Hennig**, would have listened to doctors, we would have quit 15 years ago. But I don't know Edge's working environment because they are a media company, not a wrestling company."

Hogan later clarified his comments, claiming that he intended no disrespect, even though his initial tweet made it sound like he was calling Edge soft.

While on the subject of Hogan, "The Hulkster" pulled an Angle and called "gimmick infringement" ... then he took it to court. Hogan filed suit against a St. Louis car dealership, claiming that the company violated his likeness by using some of Hogan's signature catchphrases in a television commercial. The commercial made frequent uses of the word "brother," referred to biceps as "guns," and mentioned "Hulkamaniacs." The case was tossed out of court. But we bet Hogan would have won if it was held in "wrestlers' court."

WWE made one of the most controversial inductions in its Hall of Fame history when it inducted **Drew Carey** into its "celebrity wing." This is the same Hall of Fame that doesn't list **Bruno Sammartino**, **Bob Backlund**, and the late **Randy Savage** among its inductees.

It seems that the use of video evidence would be perfectly admissible in a court of law. So we were a bit confused when TNA cameras caught **Winter** hand-feeding **Angelina Love** pills backstage on *Impact*, apparently drugging her into a **Linda McMahon**-like catatonic state. Isn't drugging someone for the purpose of turning them into a slave some kind of crime? We guess that means that even law enforcement officials aren't watching *Impact.*

Apparently social workers aren't watching, either, or else someone probably would have stopped the

Photo by George Napolitano

Finally recognized for his brilliant contribution to wrestling

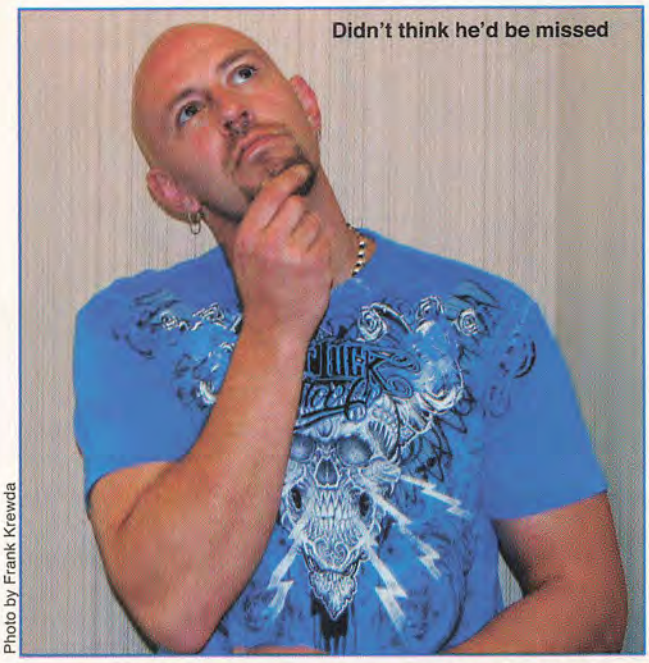
Didn't think he'd be missed

Photo by Frank Krewda

Kurt Angle/**Jeff Jarrett** match at Against All Odds. Angle and Jarrett made a unique wager on their PPV bout—if Jarrett won, Angle would have to walk his ex-wife, **Karen**, down the aisle as she renewed her wedding vows with Jarrett. If Angle won, he would win custody of their children. Naturally, wrestling ability is the most important quality when determining custody rights. Who knew? Oh, and Jarrett won the match, but Kurt responded by menacing the Jarretts with an axe and having buckets of horse manure dumped onto Karen.

Despite rumors to the contrary, **Justin Credible** has *not* gone missing in action. The former ECW champion was the subject of Internet rumors, speculating on his whereabouts and well-being. Apparently, Credible left an independent card in Maryland as soon as his match was over so he could get a headstart on his drive home. After the show, fans started tweeting, wondering where he was, and rumors began to spread. As it turned out, Credible was safe and sound at home. Perhaps the weirdest aspect of this story was that fans apparently *wanted* to see Credible (easy Justin, we're just kidding).

Poor **Okata.** In a year filled with comic book-based blockbuster movies, Okata got stuck with a gimmick straight out of *The Green Hornet*. Okata donned a **Kato** mask and palled around with **Samoa Joe** ... which also turned out to be a poor decision. Okata got kidnapped by Joe's rival, **D'Angelo Dinero**, who tortured him backstage to send a message to Joe. Perhaps the message was that he didn't care for *The Green Hornet*. We think Okata as **Thor** would have been *much* better. And, now that we think about it, why didn't **Triple-H** sue Thor for gimmick infringement—flowing blond locks, a hammer as a weapon, and an all-powerful father (-in-law)?

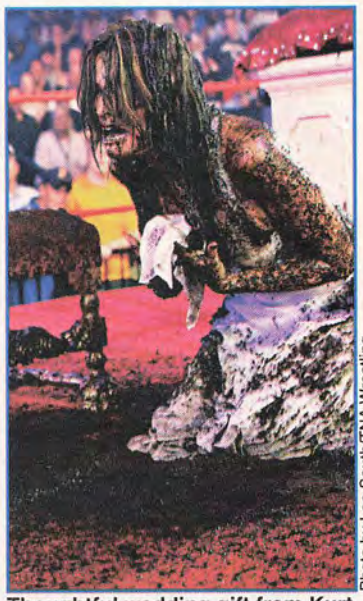
Thoughtful wedding gift from Kurt

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

There was more weirdness in the Joe/Pope feud. Okata surreptitiously videotaped Dinero as he visited a gentleman's club. Dinero responded to the embarrassing footage by calling Joe fat ... over and over again. The highlight of the feud had to be when Joe gave "The Pope" a musclebuster through a suckling pig. Yes, a suckling pig laid out luau-style in the middle of the ring.

Finally, we turn our attention to **Santino Marella**. The final moments of the Royal Rumble always seem to be dramatic super-clashes as a select few of WWE's top stars battle it out and try to stave off elimination. This year, Marella almost won the Rumble using the Cobra, of all moves. Marella had been thrown under the ropes and was dazed on the outside of the ring as **Alberto Del Rio** eliminated Randy Orton, seemingly winning the Rumble. But Marella had not been eliminated. He snuck back into the ring, signaled for perhaps the silliest finishing move since **Sgt. Slaughter's** Noogie of Doom, and flattened Del Rio. But just when it looked like Santino was on the road to WrestleMania 27, Del Rio reversed Marella's elimination attempt, tossing him to the floor. There's always next year, Santino!

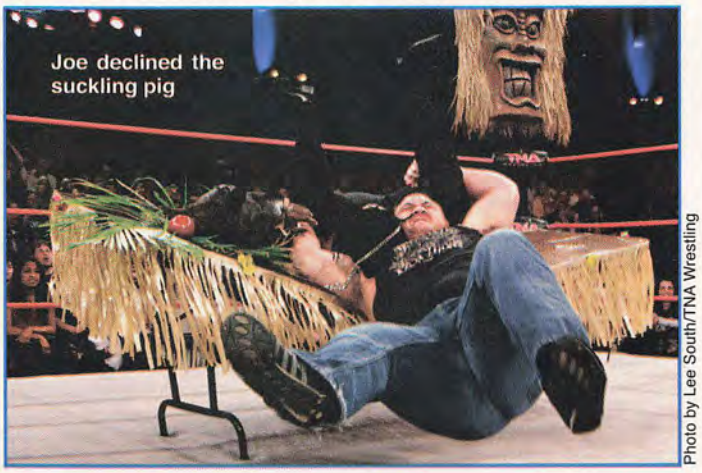
Joe declined the suckling pig

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

In the July 2011 issue of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED, we issued our annual report cards to some of wrestling's top stars, evaluating their success over the previous 12 months. Due to space limitations, we were forced to focus on 50 top stars, which we thoroughly assessed on a variety of criteria.

Here, we cut right to the chase with a concise and direct evaluation of more than 100 stars, grading them on their performance for the first six months of 2011.

Only a handful of superstars earned A's through the mid-year. Those that did either had world title success or greatly improved their standing in their respective promotion in the past six months. The B's were wrestlers who enjoyed some moments of greatness or were consistently solid performers over the past six months. The C students are the ones who have struggled and might benefit from some extra tutoring (or at least doing their homework before stepping into the ring).

As for the D's and F's ... well, they may need to make some drastic changes before they find themselves "future endeavored" back down to the independent circuit.

The grades are in. Now let's sort out the Honor Roll from the class clowns.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

THEY GET AN "A": **The Miz** was almost as good as he claims to be. Almost ... **John Cena** held his own in his verbal battle with The Rock and managed to regain the WWE title, even if he came up short at WrestleMania ... **Beer Money** got their priorities straight and helped Fortune take a stand against the evil influence of Hulk Hogan and Immortal ... **Jeff Jarrett** has somehow become one of the most consistently entertaining characters in TNA ... **Eddie Edwards** won the Ring of Honor title in an upset and has defended it well against Christopher Daniels and Rod Strong ... **Bully Ray** didn't win any friends by turning on Devon, but he established himself as one of TNA's most feared wrestlers and became a World title contender ... **Edge** had a short but glorious half-year, and we wish him well in his retirement.

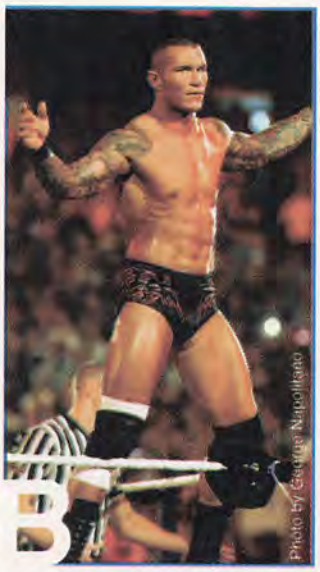

Photo by George Napolitano

THEY GET A "B": **Randy Orton** failed to regain the WWE title and was drafted to Smackdown, but it didn't take him long to get back on the title track on the blue brand ... **Kurt Angle** has been locked in an absolute war with the Jarretts and shows no sign of backing down ... **Jerry Lawler** came ever-so-close to his first WWE championship and finally got a chance to compete at WrestleMania, though he ultimately came up short in both efforts ... **Sting** proved he still has gas in the tank and added another World title to his championship resume ... **Alberto Del Rio** won the Royal Rumble, but his so-called destiny remains unfulfilled and his luxury car took a beating ... **Madison Rayne** had a lengthy Knockouts title reign, even if she relied on Tara's interference and a loaded glove to protect her title ... **Mickie James** overcame a serious shoulder injury and took Rayne's belt to become the third women to hold women's titles in both WWE and TNA ... **Kazarian** elevated the prestige of X division title to new heights ... **Mr. Anderson** has defied authority and earned his spot as the top contender for the TNA World title, but he has to prove he has what it takes to be a long-term champion ... **AJ Styles** had some great moments but failed to assert himself as a top contender for the World title—and that's what he should be ... Getting his face "mangled" turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to **Cody Rhodes**, as it finally ignited his killer instinct ... **The World's Greatest Tag Team** and **The Kings of Wrestling** lived up to their names with a terrific feud in ROH ... **Roderick Strong** did an admirable job carrying the ball for ROH before dropping the strap to Edwards ... **Kofi Kingston** has held both of WWE's secondary titles in the past half-year and is ready for another opportunity as a main-eventer ... **Velvet Sky** has improved markedly and is positioning herself for a possible run as Knockouts champion ... **Gunner** proved to be a formidable TV champion and continues to excel in the indy ranks as **Phill Shatter**.

THEY GET A "C": We have to wonder if **CM Punk** is having second thoughts about taking over The Nexus; the group has been a major disap-

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

pointment under his leadership ... **Matt Hardy** got his career off to a fresh start in TNA, but he's still stuck on a mid-card treadmill ... **Christian** achieved a lifelong dream, but dropped the World title before he even got his own personalized faceplate for the belt ... **Sheamus** ended his slump by relieving Daniel Bryan of the U.S. title, but quickly lost the belt to Kofi Kingston and went back to his losing ways ... WWE's best tag team of the mid-year was **Santino Marella** and **Vladimir Kozlov** ... Technically, no one ever beat **Rob Van Dam** to take his title last year, but that was a year ago and RVD hasn't done much to get that belt back ... **Heath Slater** and **Justin Gabriel** have the potential to be a great team, but they just can't seem to gain any traction ... **Rey Mysterio Jr.** remains popular but seems to be slowing a bit as retirement rumors continue to dog him ... **The Big Show** and **Mark Henry** are both big, strong, and dangerous when motivated, but their motivation is inconsistent ... **D'Angelo Dinero** bit off a bit more than he could chew with Samoa Joe ... **Samoa Joe** won his feud with Dinero, but he's losing his feud with Crimson ... **Wade Barrett** formed The Corre and won the Intercontinental title, but he has fallen a far way from his days as a PPV headliner last year ... **Homicide** may have thought the grass would be greener in Ring of Honor, but he has struggled since leaving TNA ... **John Morrison** has gotten a lot of attention for his athleticism, but when it comes to winning important matches, he's still not getting the job done ... **Layla** scored a big win by beating Michelle McCool in a loser-leaves-WWE match, but now she's without her biggest ally ... Team Mexican America is gaining momentum, and **Sarita** and **Rosita** look darn good with title belts around their waists ... **Matt Morgan** slipped from pay-per-view main events into a go-nowhere feud with Scott Steiner ... It's hard to believe that **Drew McIntyre** was once touted as a future world champion by Vince McMahon himself ... Even harder to believe is that **Brie Bella's** name will go down in the history books as a Divas champion, but it will.

THEY GET A "D": **Alex Riley** set himself up for a better second half of the year... **Angelina Love** allowed Winter to drug her into zombie-ism, turned on her BFF, and completely fell out of contention for the Knockouts title ... *NXT* alumni **David Otunga** and **Michael McGillicutty** are experiencing a sophomore slump ... Once again, **Kane** has gone soft after a run of sadism and utter domination in 2010 ... Believe it or not, **Zack Ryder** is actually developing a cult following ... **Jack Swagger** dropped from the World championship to being Michael Cole's personal trainer ... **Tyler Reks** has a good look, but you wouldn't know it, since he barely gets any TV time ... **Tyson Kidd** is perennially underrated, but he has slipped off the radar.

THEY GET AN "F": **Jeff Hardy** lost the World title, embarrassed himself at Victory Road, and may be facing time in a federal penitentiary on drug charges ... **Husky Harris** took a boot to the head and was never seen again ... You know you're doing a lousy job as a bodyguard when you get beat up and the person you're guarding actually has to bail you out of trouble: **Brodus Clay**, we're looking at you ... Even with that silver spoon in his mouth, **Ted DiBiase Jr.** has been a complete non-factor ... Same with **The Great Khali** ... The brief feud between **Max** and **Jeremy Buck** set Generation Me back months ... Is **JTG** still getting a WWE paycheck?

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

THEY GET AN INCOMPLETE: **The Undertaker** and **Triple-H** looked fantastic at WrestleMania, but that was their only match during the grading period ... In the same vein, **The Rock** talked a good game, but the leader of Team Bring It is going to have to put up or shut up sometime soon, hopefully before WrestleMania 28 ... **Chyna** looked good at Sacrifice, but it remains to be seen whether she'll stick around for the long haul ... **Kharma** has terrified the Divas division, but as of this writing, we're still waiting for her to compete in her first WWE match ... **Sin Cara** debuted amidst plenty of hype, but we're reserving judgment for now ... It's way too early to refer to **Mason Ryan** as "Batistwo," but he's certainly a big boy with a lot of potential ... Same goes for **Ezekiel Jackson**, who missed lots of time to injury.

[1] The Undertaker vs. Triple-H [WrestleMania 27]

With both 'Taker and Triple-H enjoying drastically reduced in-ring schedules in recent years, this match had all the appearances of a trap. Could these two men really answer the bell after all these years, or were the fans simply watching the painful last chapters of the careers of two all-time greats? The brutal and grueling no-holds-barred match lasted nearly a half-hour and saw each man unload his full arsenal of offense. When 'Taker forced Triple-H to tap out to the Hells' Gate, raising his 'Mania record to 19-0, it was clear to all who witnessed the event that they may have just seen the best match of either man's career.

[2] Beer Money Inc. vs. The Motor City Machine Guns [Genesis]

On paper, it's easy to see a match like this one and assume it will be an instant classic. More often than not, however, the hype ends up being more memorable than the contest itself. On rare occasions, the match itself *exceeds* expectations, as was the case here. With TNA World tag team championship gold on the line, both tandems were at their absolute best from bell to bell. All men involved were tag team specialists throughout their careers, which may be why the match flowed like no other in TNA during the half-year. In an unfortunate punctuation mark on what was otherwise a flawless bout, Beer Money scored the victory, and the title, when Alex Shelley was the unintended recipient of a superkick from teammate Chris Sabin.

[3] Christopher Daniels vs. Eddie Edwards [ROH Ninth Anniversary Show]

Rivaling only the intentional disqualification, a time-limit draw can oftentimes be the least satisfying way to end a match in professional wrestling. Then, there are times where a time-limit draw may be the only fair way for a bout to end. At ROH's Ninth Anniversary Show, the two-out-of-three-falls, TV championship match between Christopher Daniels and Eddie Edwards ended at the 30-minute mark with both men holding a fall apiece. After scoring the first pinfall, Daniels looked primed to end the match early, but a resilient Edwards evened the bout at one fall apiece. An injured Daniels would have been counted out in the third fall had time not expired before the referee could complete his 10-count.

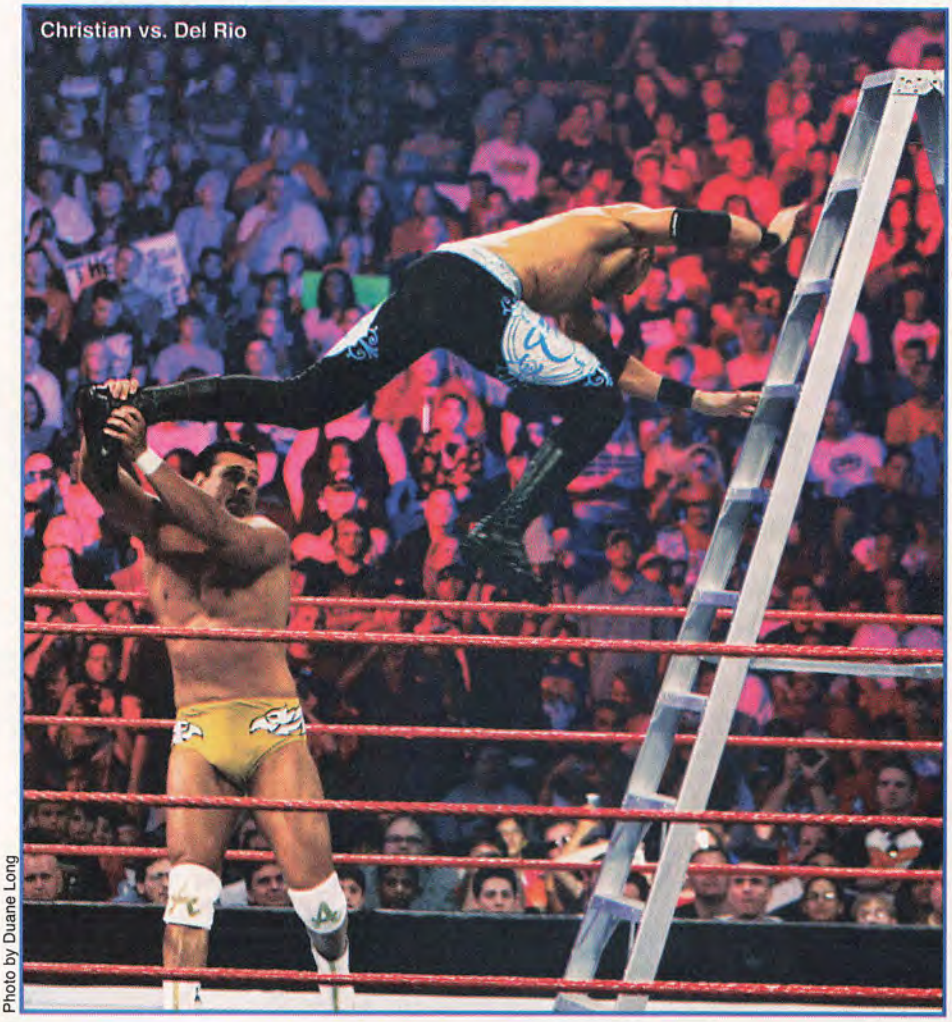
Christian vs. Del Rio

Photo by Duane Long

[4] AJ Styles vs. Matt Hardy [Victory Road]

Sometimes, the best matches have absolutely nothing on the line but pride. Perhaps Styles was still hurt that former mentor Ric Flair had chosen fellow North Carolinian Hardy to be his latest project. Whatever the internal motivation (aside from the blood feud between Fortune and Immortal), Styles once again reaffirmed his position as the best all-around wrestler in TNA, if not the industry itself. Hardy fought with the resilience and agil-

ity he exhibited in his many successful years in WWE. Neither man relented in their attack for the duration of the bout, making it readily apparent that he who made the less egregious error would emerge victorious. In a match filled with near-falls and high spots, Styles prevailed after a crushing Pele kick on a soaring Hardy followed by a Spiral Tap and pinfall.

[5] Christian vs. Alberto Del Rio [Extreme Rules]

For sentimental favorite Christian, it was as close to perfection as he had ever come. In the case of his much more highly promoted adversary, Alberto Del Rio, this was simply the culmination of expectations nearly as large as the man's gargantuan ego. Although it seemed that Christian may have a competitive advantage as the veteran of numerous ladder matches, Del Rio's desire for WWE world championship gold truly leveled the playing field. After interference on behalf of both competitors, it was the simple blare of a car horn—by the recently retired Edge—that distracted Del Rio and gave Christian the opening he needed to unlatch the hanging belt and capture his first world singles title in WWE.

[6] Edge vs. Rey Mysterio Jr. vs. Kane vs. Drew McIntyre vs. Big Show vs. Wade Barrett [Elimination Chamber]

Only two times prior in the nine-year history of the match has the incumbent champion walked away from the Elimination Chamber with the gold. For Edge to become the third man to do so, he was going to have to outlast a field consisting of three former world champions and two men seemingly on the cusp of their first reigns. After a brutal 31-plus minutes in the ring, Edge emerged from the hellish chamber still World champion. With the odds decidedly not in his favor, Edge was able to withstand the onslaught of both Kane and Rey Mysterio Jr., leading to ferocious spears and pinfalls of each. With the victory, Edge joined Triple-H and Shawn Michaels as the only three standing champs to retain.

[7] Chris Hero & Claudio Castagnoli vs. Kenny King & Rhett Titus [ROH Ninth Anniversary Show]

In ROH, matches generally don't get any bigger than this one, featuring longtime tag team champs the Kings of Wrestling (Hero and Castagnoli) defending the gold against The All-Night Express (King and Titus). Quick tags and fast-paced action highlighted the bulk of the contest and wove a dizzying tapestry for the computer audience to follow. In true rulebreaker fashion, however, it was Hero's use of a loaded elbow pad that allowed the champs to retain the title.

[8] Jeff Hardy vs. Mr. Anderson [Against All Odds]

What appeared to be the start of a long and memorable feud reached its premature culmination at Against All Odds. Two more different rivals may not exist in TNA than the proudly obnoxious Mr. Anderson and the increasingly obscure Jeff Hardy. The men had traded victories, and the TNA World title, in their previous two main-event matchups, at Bound for Glory and Genesis. With the gold back on the line in the rubber match of the unofficial championship series, it would be the enigmatic Hardy reviving the woefully sagging morale of his Immortal cohorts by capturing his second TNA World title. In one of the more epic ladder matches in TNA history, Hardy outlasted Anderson—and multiple drops from the apparatus—to secure the victory.

[9] Jay & Mark Briscoe vs. Alex Cole & Kyle O'Reilly [Honor Takes Center Stage]

Arguably the best tag team to not be competing for WWE or TNA, The Briscoe Brothers consistently deliver every time they step between the ropes. So much so that even when you're *supposed* to hate them, it's hard to do so. In this case, though, the fans in Atlanta were completely behind Cole and O'Reilly. At one point, the match turned into little more than an artistic, four-man blur of action with Cole and O'Reilly operating in perfect synchronization and the Briscoes countering at every step. The veteran brothers emerged triumphant after a very well-timed springboard Doomsday Device.

[10] Christopher Daniels, Kazarian, James Storm, & Robert Roode vs. Ric Flair, Matt Hardy, Abyss, & Bully Ray [Lockdown]

Historically a hodgepodge of death-defying acts and flesh-tearing brutality, this year's Lethal Lockdown match did not fail to keep with tradition. Yet, the inclusion of the likes of Daniels, Roode, and a surprise entrant in AJ Styles added an old-school X division feel to the bout. Sure, there was the obligatory cage slams, and crimson masks were part of the dress code, but it would be hard to think of this match in the future and not recall Daniels' amazing cross-bodyblock from the ceiling onto Hardy and Abyss down on the floor below. Lethal Lockdown 2011 blended the TNA standards for a cage match with its new "Wrestling Matters" theme, giving the fans a very memorable main event.

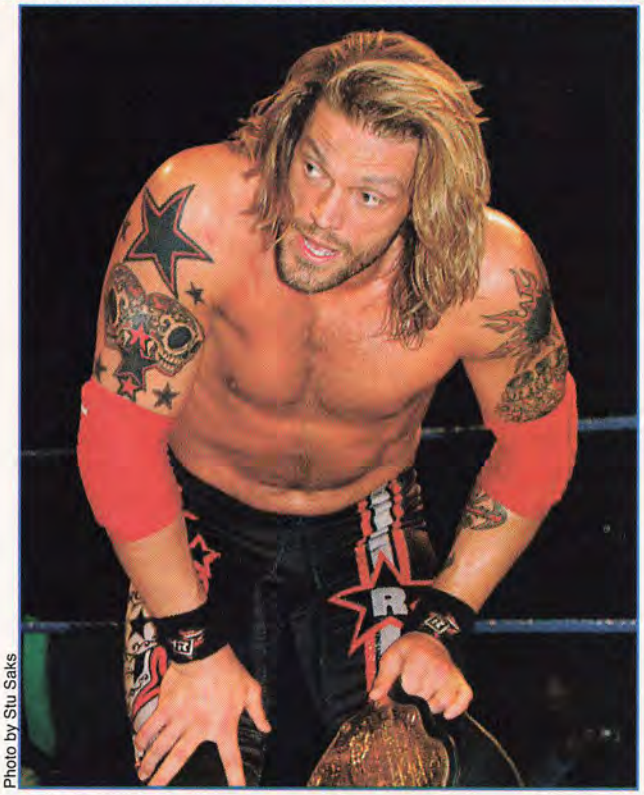

Photo by Stu Saks

WRESTLER OF THE MID-YEAR: EDGE

Don't get the wrong impression; we're not picking Edge as the Wrestler of the Mid-Year because he is a sentimental pick. Edge is the Wrestler of the Mid-Year because he deserves to be.

On April 11, Edge announced his retirement due to severe spinal injuries. He was only active for the first three months of the year ... but he was spectacular during those months.

In January, Edge feuded with Dolph Ziggler, successfully defending the World title against Ziggler several times, including at the Royal Rumble. He stepped into the Elimination Chamber and put his championship up against five men—Kane, The Big Show, Rey Mysterio Jr., Wade Barrett, and Drew McIntyre— and walked out of the cage 30 minutes later with his championship intact.

Then, at WrestleMania, Edge successfully defended his title once again, turning back the challenge of Alberto Del Rio.

By all appearances, Edge was at the top of his game. A week after that match, Edge revealed that he was suffering from cervical spinal stenosis, a degenerative spinal condition stemming from spinal fusion surgery he underwent in 2003. Edge had been suffering from pain and numbness in his arms and hands. While Edge was dominating in the ring, he was awaiting test results to determine the severity of the injury. The injury proved to be career-ending.

Even if he weren't injured, Edge's performance over the first months of 2011 was impressive. When you consider that he was wrestling in pain and likely distracted by anxiety over the medical tests he was undergoing, it makes his performance truly extraordinary.

TAG TEAM OF THE MID-YEAR: BEER MONEY INC.

Robert Roode and James Storm edged out The Kings of Wrestling to earn our designation as the Tag Team of the Mid-Year.

Beer Money had a disappointing 2010, including several losses to perennial rivals The Motor City Machine Guns. But Roode and Storm got their act together in the first half of 2011, winning their fourth TNA World tag team championship at Genesis and re-establishing themselves as TNA's finest tandem.

Beer Money did more than simply add another tag team title to their impressive resume. They also took a stand for TNA by breaking away from Ric Flair and Immortal. Roode and Storm stepped up and became leaders instead of followers, helping the homegrown stars of Fortune break out of Immortal's shadow.

Beer Money also successfully defended the tag team title against a variety of challengers, including the Machine Guns, Shannon Moore and Jesse Neal, and Matt Hardy and Chris Harris. They have been honorable and active champions, and have excelled without relying on the cheating and underhanded tactics that marked their previous reigns.

Beer Money has been the cornerstone of TNA's tag team division, which remains arguably the best of any American promotion. Both Storm and Roode have also been ambassadors for TNA, establishing themselves as one of the company's most popular and versatile acts. Roode, in particular, has had a standout year, becoming the spokesman for Fortune and showing more passion and determination than ever before.

Ring of Honor's Kings of Wrestling (Chris Hero

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

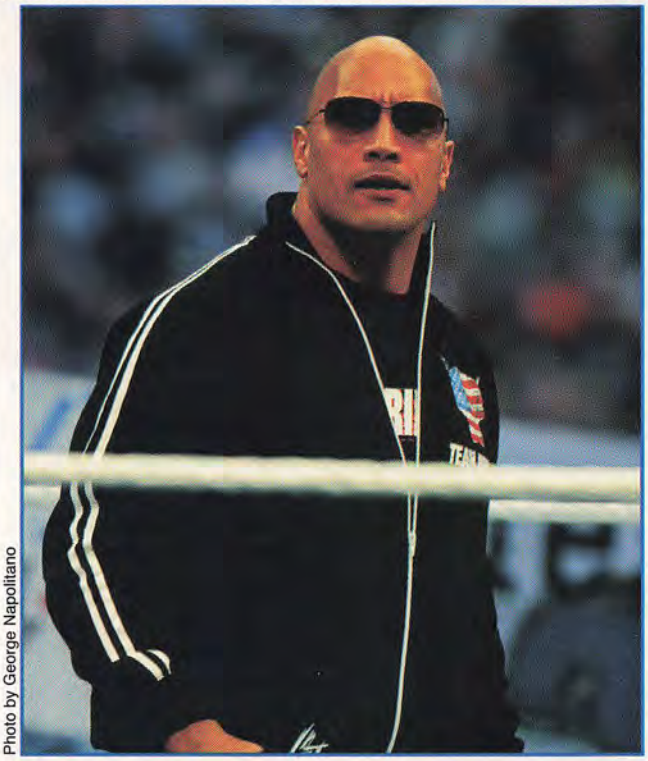

Photo by George Napolitano

and Claudio Castagnoli) have also been impressive, but their title loss to Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas cost them in the competition for this award.

MOST POPULAR: THE ROCK

The most popular wrestler of the first half of 2011 hasn't wrestled a match since 2004, but that didn't stop him from becoming WWE's most electrifying star, directly influencing the main event of WrestleMania 27, and getting locked into a main event slot for WrestleMania 28.

Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson returned to WWE on the February 14 edition of *Raw*. The Rock delivered a classic interview, thanking the fans for their ongoing support and promising that he would always be a part of the WWE family. He also took several shots at John Cena, taking issue with Cena's assertions that Rock had turned his back on WWE in favor of Hollywood. Rock then announced he would be the special guest host of WrestleMania.

Rock and Cena traded barbs for weeks, both on *Raw* and on Twitter. Though fans were split on Cena, Rock received overwhelming support. Even after Rock floored Cena with a Rock Bottom, allowing The Miz to retain the WWE championship at 'Mania, the fans were still solidly behind "The Great One."

The following night, Rock accepted a challenge from Cena, but demanded the match take place at WrestleMania 28, setting the WrestleMania main event a full year in advance. As further evidence of Rock's overwhelming popularity, the entire May 2 edition of *Raw* was dedicated as a celebration of The Rock's birthday. Not too shabby for a guy who hasn't wrestled a match in seven years.

Even though he only made a handful of appearances, The Rock showed that he is in a class of his own when it comes to charisma, star power, and popularity. No one else comes close.

MOST HATED: THE MIZ

The critics complained that Miz had no business being the WWE champion. He was called "undeserving," "overrated," and "an embarrassment." But somehow, Miz managed to take on Randy Orton, John Morrison, Jerry Lawler, and John Cena, and still hang on to the championship for several months.

Miz' success only made the fans hate him more.

Let's face it—it's easy to hate The Miz. He's smug, obnoxious, and irritating. He constantly relies on outside interference from Alex Riley. He ducked challengers and constantly cheats, all while proclaiming his "awesomeness."

Miz feuded with WWE's most beloved stars. He even goaded Lawler away from the announcers' table and into a feud; just like most of the fans, Lawler simply couldn't stand the guy.

Miz knows that most fans hate his guts. He loves being hated. He loves the fact that he managed to succeed in WWE on his own terms and climbed to the WWE championship when so many critics wrote him off as a reality-show clown. In fact, his WrestleMania 27 highlight video package was set to a song entitled "Hate Me Now."

Miz eventually lost the WWE championship to Cena, but even without the title belt around his waist, he's still far and away the most hated wrestler in WWE. Perhaps the most infuriating aspect about Miz' persona is that he genuinely believes that he is the prototype for the next generation of WWE superstars. He believes that the ends justify the means, that personality is more important than sportsmanship, and that respect can be commanded instead of earned. He's the worst kind of professional athlete, and there's nothing awesome about that.

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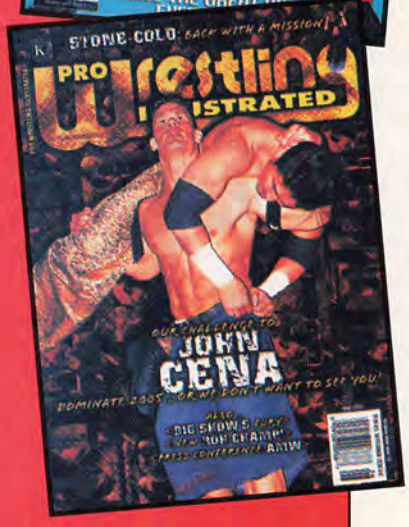

September 1990: The Hulkster's Wrath: 7,000 Miles To Violent Redemption. Centerfold: The Steiners. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Sting, Destruction Crew, Four Horsemen, Curt Hennig.

February 1992: Has Hulk Hogan Had Enough? Centerfold: 1992 calendar. Plus: Sting, Justice-Roberts, hot prospects, Eddie Gilbert.

May 1992: Revitalized In Tokyo: Hulk Hogan Is Super-Psyched For WrestleMania VII! Centerfold: Rick Rude. Plus: Sting & Muta-Steiners, Jarrett & Fuller, Lightning Kid, Randy Savage, intimidation.

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December 2000: Head Hog! Does Undertaker Have Enough Gas In His Tank To Rumble To The Top? Centerfold: Dallas Page. Plus: Kurt Angle, Rikishi, Vampiro-Sting, Japan.

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2011 SUPER 8 WINNER TOMMASO CIAMPA:

"I COULDN'T BE DENIED A THIRD TIME!"

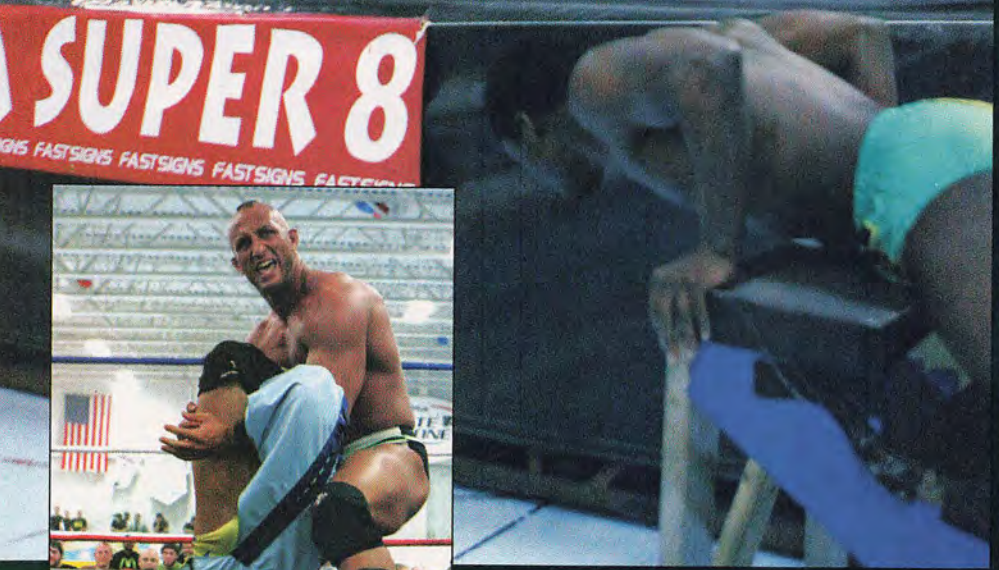
TEXT BY BRADY HICKS
PHOTOS BY GEORGE TAHINOS

THIS YEAR WAS going to be different. Tommaso Ciampa swore it would be. No obstacle or opponent was going to stand in his way as he prepared for the East Coast Wrestling Association's 2011 Super 8 tournament.

This year's show offered Ciampa yet another chance—and in his own view, his final chance—to take home the coveted trophy that he had been one victory away from winning the past two years.

It didn't matter that this year's tournament was widely considered one of the most talent-rich in its storied 15-year history. Nor did it matter that Adam Cole, Ciampa's eventual final-round opponent, was, by Ciampa's

Though he was able to defeat Rich Swann in the fist round, Tommaso Ciampa suffered a rib injury in the match that would plague him throughout the Super 8 tournament. But Ciampa was not about to let some sore ribs stop him from leaving with the trophy.



Ciampa grimaces in pain as he eliminates Shiima Xion with a modified Cloverleaf in the second round of the tournament.

sional sports. Ciampa just had to thumb his nose at the idea that Lady Luck would play a role in this tourney's outcome. For Ciampa, winning the Super 8 was beyond luck—it was a matter of preparation, desire, execution, and proving wrong all those who had doubted him his whole life.

Ever since Ciampa was a little boy growing up in Boston, Massachusetts, he was told that he could never be a successful wrestler. "People have always told me I was too small, too awkward, not athletic enough," he recalled. "Even my own parents were convinced I'd only get hurt."

Despite friends and family members dismissing his desire to wrestle, WWE releasing him because they saw little potential, disheartening Super 8 final-round losses to Nick Logan (2009) and Austin "Consequences" Creed (2010), Ciampa never lost faith in himself. Even when Creed parlayed his own Super 8 win into a WWE developmental contract (as Xavier Wood), Ciampa never considered packing it in. "I was very happy for Austin," he said. "He didn't need to win the Super 8 to get on WWE's radar. But he was so hungry, and he went out and took the trophy. That's when I

own admission, "hands down, the most gifted of everybody I had ever been in the ring with at Super 8, all three years." And it did not matter that Ciampa picked up the Super 8 trophy before the tournament got underway, which is one of the biggest no-no's in all of profes-

realized it should have been me getting noticed, getting written up in *PWI*."

In Ciampa's mind, Super 8 2011 was the last time he'd get the chance to make everyone take notice of him. After all, no wrestler is guaranteed an invitation to return to the Super 8 the following year. The prospect of competing against some of the most talented wrestlers on the East Coast—much less the prospect of coming in second place in three consecutive tournaments—would be enough to unnerve most wrestlers. But, on April 30, Ciampa wasn't like most wrestlers. He was on a mission to not just achieve a dream, but to also avoid being typecast as an also-ran.

"Sure, losing two years in a row gets in your head," Ciampa said. "But I had two choices: let the moment overtake me or do everything in my power to come home with the trophy. And I couldn't be denied a third time!"

That might be an oversimplification on Ciampa's part, especially considering this year's level of competition, but given the tunnel vision with which he entered the 2011 tournament, he can be forgiven.

Ciampa began his quest against Rich Swann, an acrobatic wrestler known for his amazing standing 450-splash. Ciampa would sustain a lot of damage in this match, including a moonsault off the apron and a standing 450 that nearly ended his night with a rib injury. Undaunted, Tommaso was able to deliver his Project Ciampa, a power bomb-lung blower, to pick up the win.

In the second round, Ciampa faced former AAA star Shiima Xion. Ciampa began this match as the aggressor, but thanks to his rib injury,

SUPER 8 WAS ADAM COLE'S COMING-OUT PARTY

Despite so much attention rightfully being paid to Tommaso Ciampa's long-sought Super 8 victory, ECWA fans were also abuzz over the day's work turned in by Adam Cole on April 30.

In some ways, it was only fitting that Ciampa met Cole in the final round of the 2011 Super 8 Tournament. In the opinion of many insiders, Cole has established himself as arguably the most impressive independent wrestler currently based on the East Coast. Just weeks before the Super 8, Cole had won CZW's prestigious Best of the Best tournament. He's also earned rave reviews from fans for his work in Ring of Honor, CHIKARA, and the Tri-State Wrestling Alliance.

Even Ciampa, who knows Cole from ROH, was impressed enough to give Cole a tip of the cap at the Super 8 after party. "Adam brought out the best in me today," Ciampa said. "When I saw his matches against Sami Callahan and Austin Aries (*see full Super 8 results and additional photos in "Arena Reports," page 112*), I knew our match was going to be a war. Adam has it all: skill, speed, and a ton of heart. It is very rewarding to know I beat one of the very best wrestlers out there."

Ironically, Cole finds himself in the same position Ciampa was in when he faced Bryan Logan in the 2009 Super 8 final. Even though he lost to Logan, Ciampa's name was on everyone's lips after the card. With three hard-fought bouts to his credit at Super 8 2011, Cole emerges as a crowd-pleasing standout with a very bright future.

"It was an honor and privilege to share the ring with seven incredible wrestlers," Cole said. "I didn't get the gold this time, but this was my first Super 8, and I'm sure I'll get another crack at it."

—Brady Hicks

The explosive Cole shows off his skills

Adam Cole had just unleashed an awe-inspiring Panama Sunrise on Ciampa, but to no avail. Ciampa quickly kicked out of a pin attempt and yelled at Cole to hit him again. At that point, it was clear that Ciampa's tough run at the Super 8 would soon be over.

Xion was able to hang with him ... until Ciampa locked on his modified Cloverleaf for the submission win.

Feeling much like a member of the Buffalo Bills teams of the late-'80s and early-'90s, Tommaso found himself in the championship round of the tourney for the third straight year. But unlike the poor Bills, who lost in four Super Bowl appearances, Ciampa was bound and determined to not be remembered as the guy who always drops the championship match.

Across the ring from him stood another indy standout, Adam Cole, who had taken a similarly tough path to the final round *(see sidebar)*. Ciampa's ribs ached as he sized up Cole, but from the outset, Ciampa made it clear he wanted to have nothing in common with Jim Kelly or any other Bill. He seized the early advantage by battering Cole with forearms and kicks. Cole countered with a sleeperhold and a splash to the ringside floor. Back in the ring, both men traded blows and maneuvers, with neither gaining a sustained advantage. But as the match wore on, Ciampa's tournament experience—and his determination—proved the deciding factors. After absorbing Cole's Panama Sunrise, a top-rope Canadian Destroyer, Ciampa rose to his feet and demanded Cole hit him again. A few minutes later, Ciampa dazed Cole with a series of five running knees to the head and then finished him off with a top-rope cradle slam.

Super 8 hostess Tammy Sytch hands Ciampa the trophy that eluded his grasp for two straight years. Tommaso, who some said couldn't win the tournament, says the trophy represents more to him than fans can imagine.

With his dream realized, Ciampa dialed down the intensity and graciously thanked the fans and promoters for putting together such a thrilling card. He also thanked Cole for pushing him to such an impressive performance. But deep down, Ciampa reveled in the satisfaction of accomplishing a goal that was about so much more than winning a trophy.

"I needed to win the Super 8 this year for my own sanity," he joked. "I needed to prove to myself and to everyone else that I could follow through and achieve my goal for a change. These past three years, I have had a lifetime of experiences that have changed me. I've worked toward winning the Super 8 more than anyone else in the tournament, maybe even more than anyone else in its history. But I can say now, as I look to move on to other challenges, this trophy represents more to me than you can imagine. Now, nobody can say I didn't make it as a wrestler." □

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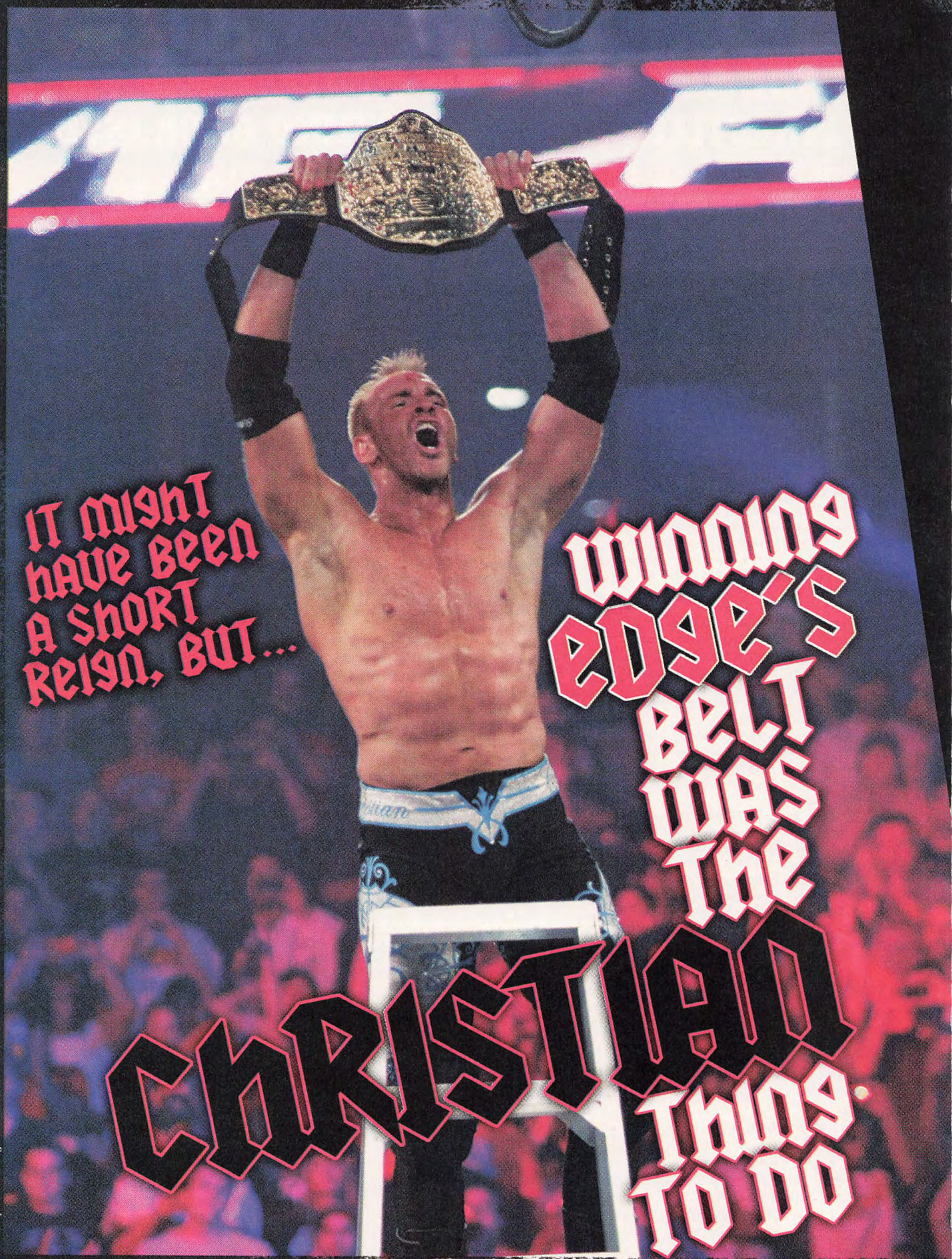


IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A SHORT REIGN, BUT...

WINNING EDGE'S BELT WAS THE CHRISTIAN THING TO DO

Photo by Duane Long

TEXT BY HARRY BURKETT

F DEFEATING ALBERTO Del Rio to win the vacant WWE World championship at Extreme Rules was Christian's high point in the wrestling business, then it's logical to assume that his title loss to Randy Orton at a *Smackdown* taping only two days later was his low point. Right?

Wrong—at least if we take Christian at his word. Like any would-be Oscar winner, Christian is offering the line that it was an honor just being "nominated" for a title reign. After all, it's much more gratifying for Christian to reminisce about his World heavyweight title win rather than his World heavyweight title reign—unless he enjoyed one heckuva Monday in between. And, actually, he spent Monday night on *Raw*, being honored with a short video package and receiving congratulations from The Rock.

Christian never had a successful title defense and didn't even survive one full episode of *Smackdown*. That's reminiscent of Tommy Rich's winning the NWA World title from Harley Race in Augusta, Georgia, and dropping the belt back to Race five days later in Gainesville. At no point did he get a chance to defend the belt at Atlanta's Omni or even appear with the belt on *Georgia Championship Wrestling*. At least Rich's supporters could claim that "Wildfire" had demonstrated his future potential. Christian's World title reign—three days shorter than Rich's—occurred at presumably the twilight of his career.

So what did Christian's World title victory prove? For one, it puts his name on the list of 48 men who have held either of WWE's world titles. That's an important distinction in this business. But at the time of the win over Del Rio, there was something far more pressing on his mind, or, more precisely, his heart.

"It was very important to me that I was the man to wear the belt that Edge laid down in the center of the ring on *Smackdown*," said Christian. "I know it would have left a sour taste in Edge's mouth if Del Rio had won the title. I was super-motivated, especially with Edge in the building."

Edge wasn't just in the building (the St. Pete Times Arena in Tampa), he actually played a pivotal role in the ladder match, albeit in a non-physical manner. Del Rio seemed to have matters under control and was in the process of retrieving the title belt when Edge honked the horn of his Jeep, providing the momentary distraction Christian needed to throw Del Rio from the ladder and claim victory.

"Under the circumstances, it just felt right that my name followed Edge's in the championship lineage," said Christian. "Sure I would have liked to have had a substantial title reign, but, given the choice of winning Edge's belt at this particular point in time and losing it right away or winning it at another time and holding a chunk of time, I'm happy with the way things turned out."

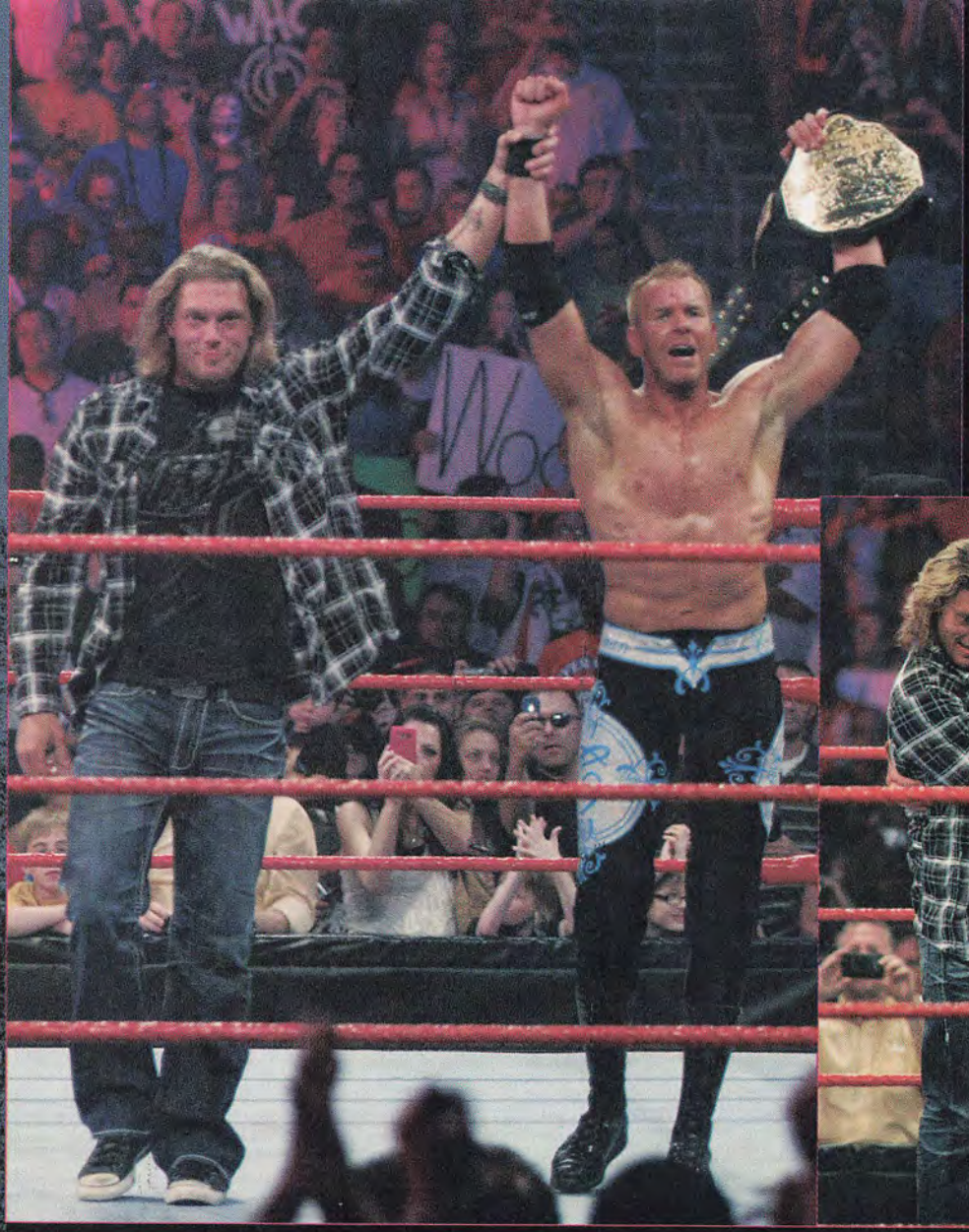
Besides, a world title reign of any length is nothing to be ashamed of, notes former World champion Booker T.

"This is the Internet age and length of title reigns don't matter much anymore," he said. "It's not so much about dominance, but what the company thinks of you. It's more like a stamp of approval. When Christian won the title, that was like—*wham*—he was marked 'world championship material' by management. And the fact that that win was credible proved Christian is world championship material in the eyes of everyone else, too."

While it's no surprise that fellow veteran Booker T would defend Christian, other sources inside the locker room suggest that Christian's comments to *PWI* about not being bitter over his two-day reign come from the heart. He couldn't be happier about his WWE career.

The same talk swirled when Christian left TNA and returned to WWE in 2009. According to the naysayers, Christian had been denied a main-event run with/against Edge on the Smackdown brand and had been "relegated" to ECW. But Christian defied the critics and had one of the most successful title reigns in the history of the WWE-owned ECW. However, his brief WWE World title reign has reinforced his "underachiever" label.

"Yeah, I've heard that talk," retorted Christian. "But it's ridiculous when you think about it. Winning the World championship has 'reinforced' my reputation as an underachiever? How could winning a world title somehow lower my reputation? I'll leave that stuff to the pundits who have to invent discussion topics. As for me, and I think most of the WWE Universe, that World title reign was a lot more important than calculating the number of days I held the belt. It



After raising his best friend's hand in victory (left), Edge and Christian share an emotional moment (below) at Extreme Rules. As a former champion, Edge was very happy that Christian finally experienced the thrill of becoming champion, especially since Christian succeeds him in the World title lineage.

Photos by Duane Long

was about something much larger than that."

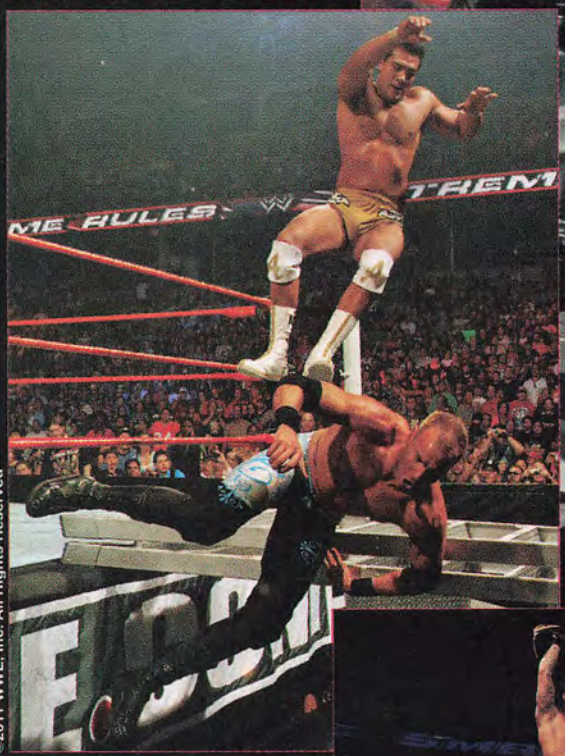
It's not hard to figure out where Christian is going with this. Edge and Christian were poised for their long-awaited reunion, much like the extended DeGeneration-X nostalgia tour of 2006-09, when Edge was forced to retire at age 37. The vertebrae-fusion surgery that Edge underwent in 2003 had extended his career considerably, but it was never going to repair his neck entirely, considering his still-highly physical style over the past eight years. On April 11, Edge announced he was diagnosed with cervical spinal stenosis, which had caused some loss of feeling in his arms, and that he would vacate the World title. Christian, again, would be denied a main-event run.

"When people look at that World title reign through the prism of what's good or isn't good for Christian, they completely miss the point," remarked Christian. "That title win over Del Rio at Extreme Rules wasn't about me. It was about Edge and the joy he gave everybody while he was literally breaking his neck for this business. It was also about what Edge and I did in this business, coming up as kids who loved WWE, and here we are—20 years later—at the pinnacle. And I think me winning the World title was the icing on the cake, where both Edge and I could look at every little kid out there and say each of us had done every single thing we set out to do in WWE. And I think what happened a couple of days later was a continuation of that story. I don't hold a grudge against Randy Orton. He's the future of WWE."

Obviously, Christian, Edge, and all their fans were sorry that another E&C run failed to occur. Creative was also mindful of this, and his capture of the vacant World title over Del Rio was a bittersweet hat tip to both Edge and Christian. It also proved there was no residual grudge

Photo by Duane Long

Perhaps overshadowed by the emotion of the moment was Christian's performance against Alberto Del Rio. The cocky Mexican had to know that taking on Christian, a veteran of ladder matches, put him at a disadvantage at Extreme Rules (right). Still, he gave Christian all he could handle (below) and might have won if he didn't lose focus at the end.



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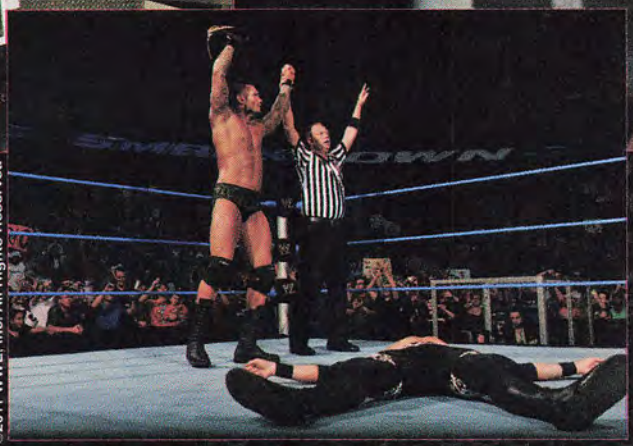

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Shortly after arriving on Smackdown, Randy Orton ended Christian's World title reign. However, Christian's WWE peers say his two-day championship run should be viewed as a major accomplishment, and not a major disappointment.

against Christian for defecting to TNA, where he held the NWA title on two occasions.

On every level, the feedback from within WWE is that Christian's two-day title reign should be viewed as nothing but a plus. Edge, his recently retired partner, agrees with that. "I can honestly watch that tape and say that Christian's World title victory was the most meaningful of my career. Sure, I held 11 world titles in WWE, but Christian's win at Extreme Rules gave him the recognition he has long deserved. And the fact that he dedicated that win to me ... well, let's just say I get choked up just thinking about it. And, by the way, I also think it is cool as hell that he'll always be listed right after me, his best friend, in the World title lineage. In a way, I was able to pass the belt on to Christian, without having to fight him. He's worked incredibly hard, and it is very gratifying to me that he was able to experience being a champion."

And perhaps that's how everyone should view Christian's World title victory. It wasn't the beginning of a disappointingly brief reign. It was the culmination—and celebration—of a 15-year journey. Yes, Christian's reign was short ... but no one can rob Christian or Edge of that special moment. □

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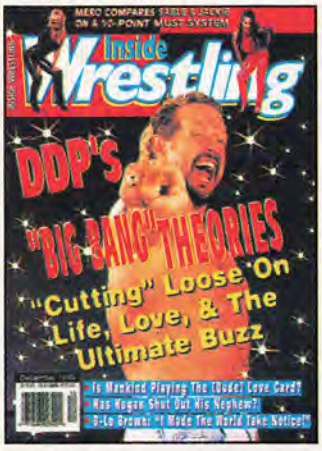

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THE BUSINESS PAGE

BY HARRY BURKETT

***Impact Wrestling* re-brand revealed** ... Less than two months after Vince McMahon confirmed he was taking "wrestling" out of World Wrestling Entertainment and that his company would simply be known by the acronym WWE, TNA executives have seized the opportunity to claim "wrestling" as its own with a major re-branding effort. The changes were revealed on the May 19 edition of *Impact Wrestling*.

The set designers in Orlando opted for a Smackdown-blue motif to replace the Raw-red look, but everyone in the company—most notably announcers Mike Tenay and Taz—made great efforts to remind viewers they were watching wrestling.

To its credit, TNA didn't make the same mistake as WCW did in its re-branding effort back in 2000 by touting the big change, almost apologizing for the previous product. Instead, TNA forged ahead with building upon the same theme it set forward several months ago—that *Impact Wrestling* would have more of a sports feel.

Sometimes the wrestlers—including AJ Styles, Tommy Dreamer, and others—seemed too eager to repeat the new "Wrestling Matters" tagline, but, all in all, for an industry that has seemed reluctant to admit that its actual business is wrestling, the new course was refreshing.

Nevertheless, Karen Jarrett was on hand with her screaming antics, Abyss—who basically has a cartoon persona—captured the X division title, and Eric Bischoff actually wrestled a match—all of which worked *against* the company's efforts to establish a more credible theme.

Most interestingly, the announcers never mentioned the TNA acronym during the entire two-hour show, instead referring only to "Impact Wrestling," making it apparent that execs were planning to re-brand the entire company, not just the flagship program. Likewise, the wrestlers (it seems so odd using that term) referred to the company's championships simply as the "World heavyweight title" and the "World tag team title" without the acronym.

For several years, the wrestling community has been pushing hard for TNA to embrace wrestling as a sport. Let's see if the company actually does it ... and whether it works.

Vince takes the initiative ... While branding mania continues, Vince McMahon has even branded WWE's expansion efforts as the "WWE Initiative." This refers to WWE's efforts to grow its business over the next few years. McMahon insists WWE will be careful not to neglect its core product

"Wrestling Matters" so much to TNA that the company posted this billboard on the corner of Cove and Avery, less than a mile from WWE's headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut. The placement isn't exactly I-95, but we're sure it came a lot cheaper.

(commonly known as "wrestling" over at the Impact Zone) while these changes occur.

WWE's major project is to create a new television network that it plans to roll out in the next 12 to 18 months. At an initial cost of $4-million to $5-million, the company is actively seeking to create and obtain content for the network, which it claims will be a "hybrid" of a traditional television network and mobile and online platforms. We have to be careful when WWE uses code words like "hybrid" because that's often an effort to lower expectations. Remember, the original idea for WWE Classics on Demand was either a basic or premium channel on traditional cable, and that morphed into a video-on-demand concept.

Nevertheless, WWE is moving forward with "Project Evergreen," which actually sounds very promising. That is WWE's effort to digitize its vast 75,000-hour-plus video library, which will make content readily available for perhaps the new network or other applications.

In addition, WWE is in full acquisition mode, seeking smaller media companies that may be a good fit within its company structure and be able to lend the expertise necessary to advance this massive initiative.

A WWE ally steps down ... Dick Ebersol, a personal friend of Vince McMahon and his key partner in creating the groundbreaking *Saturday Night's Main Event* program on NBC in 1985, has resigned from his position as head of NBC Sports. Ebersol and NBC's new parent company, Comcast, were unable to come to terms on a new contract.

Mainstream publications such as *The New York Times* didn't point out the *SNME* success in its recap of Ebersol's career, merely pointing out his "partnership with World Wrestling Entertainment to create the XFL, a bizarre, money-losing football league."

Photo by NBC Universal

Longtime McMahon friend and WWE booster Dick Ebersol has stepped down as the head of NBC Sports after failing to negotiate a contract with new parent company Comcast. With WWE as eager as ever to make a splash in the entertainment business, losing an ally in the mainstream such as Ebersol won't help.

WWE STOCKWATCH

[For the period of April 1 to May 15, 2011]

45-Day High: 12.93 on April 7
45-Day Low: 9.99 on April 29
52-Week High: 17.32 on May 17, 2010
52-Week Low: 11.75 on January 26, 2011

WWE stock plummeted from 11.43 at the close of April 28 down to 9.99 on April 29 on news that the company would be slashing its dividends from 160-percent of cash flow to 70 percent. Although cash-rich WWE's dividend payouts were always considered generous, it still came as a blow to many investors.

It was also an indicator of a company in some trouble, but, more accurately, in transition. WWE's fourth-quarter net profits were down by 28 percent, and the company is now ramping up its investments in its future television network and other non-wrestling projects. Profits are down at a time when WWE needs cash, so the dividend cut made a lot of sense. The payouts are now in line with what WWE is earning and spending.

Chief Financial Officer George Barrios conducted a 35-minute presentation at the J.P. Morgan Global Technology Conference. Among his key observations was the fact that WWE is a much stronger company than it was 10 years ago. He said that people tend to think the company must have been healthier during the Attitude Era boom, when WWE's mainstream notoriety was at a fever pitch, but that popularity didn't necessarily coincide with WWE's fiscal peak—which he claims is now.

TV BREAKDOWN

RAW [USA]

April 4: 3.8
April 11: 3.5
April 18: 3.1
April 25: 3.5
May 2: 3.5
May 9: 3.2
May 16: 3.1

Analysis: The WrestleMania effect is officially over, with *Raw* dropping to as low as 3.1 on April 18 and May 16. The three-hour WWE draft episode on April 25 did represent an uptick, however, as it reached 3.5, and, fortunately, *Raw* maintained the same number the following week for The Rock's birthday party in Miami. Apparently, the most diehard viewers are males between ages 18 and 34. When that demographic is broadened to 18 to 49, the number starts to sink. Likewise, the John Cena demographic, viewers between the ages of 12 and 17, was at an all-time low. Lower ratings always raise the question of whether Vince is spreading himself too thin with the WWE Initiative.

SMACKDOWN [Syfy]

April 1: 2.0
April 8: 2.1
April 15: 2.1
April 22: 1.9
April 29: 2.0
May 6: 1.7
May 13: 1.7

Analysis: Edge's announcement that he would vacate the World championship and the fallout after his retirement due to injuries helped keep *Smackdown* in the 1.9-2.0 range until he seconded Christian in his World title victory over Alberto Del Rio at Extreme Rules. But the numbers in the post-Edge period have been less than promising. The May 6 edition, which featured Randy Orton's quick victory over Christian for the World title, garnered only a 1.7. That was a devastating number considering such an important development and Orton's popularity. Here's hoping that Smackdown's new recruits after the talent draft—including Sheamus, Alex Riley, and Daniel Bryan—will help Orton boost its numbers. So far, though, it seems that Smackdown stars are occasionally appearing on *Raw* to provide a hotshot instead of the other way around.

TOUGH ENOUGH [USA]

April 4: 2.5
April 11: 1.8
April 18: 1.5
April 25: 1.7
May 2: 1.7
May 9: 1.6
May 16: 1.6

Analysis: After receiving a mighty launch immediately following the edition of *Raw* that followed WrestleMania 27, the revived *WWE Tough Enough* gained a healthy 2.5 rating, which was especially impressive considering its 11 p.m. Eastern timeslot. Moving to 8 p.m., preceding *Raw*, *TE* has since settled into more realistic numbers in the mid-1.0s, which is at least a half-point higher than *NXT* was doing within a few weeks of its run on Syfy. Furthermore, *Tough Enough's* ratings are more stable than *Raw's*, which suffers from more volatile fluctuations depending on whom and what are on the menu that week. The star power of Steve Austin and Trish Stratus simply adds another dimension to the already dramatic tension with the reality environment.

IMPACT [Spike]

March 31: 1.2
April 7: 1.2
April 14: 1.2
April 21: 1.2
April 28: 1.1
May 5: 1.2
May 12: 1.3

Analysis: Did TNA undergo its "Wrestling Matters" re-branding out of desperation? Probably not—that's too harsh a word. Frustration, perhaps. While Spike executives, which may or may not include Mick Foley, must be satisfied that *Impact's* ratings are quite stable, always above 1.0 and usually around 1.2 as of late. Yet *Impact* had reached a plateau, and perhaps TNA and Spike execs thought this was an opportune time to change the name of its product and kick off a marketing effort to counter WWE's "anything-but-wrestling" campaign. If TNA enacts a real change in strategy that clicks with the fans, then perhaps *Impact* has a chance of surpassing at least *Tough Enough* in the ratings, which would be an impressive feat considering Steve Austin's presence. Maybe *Impact* needs one more big name to cement the re-branding. Is anyone thinking Goldberg?

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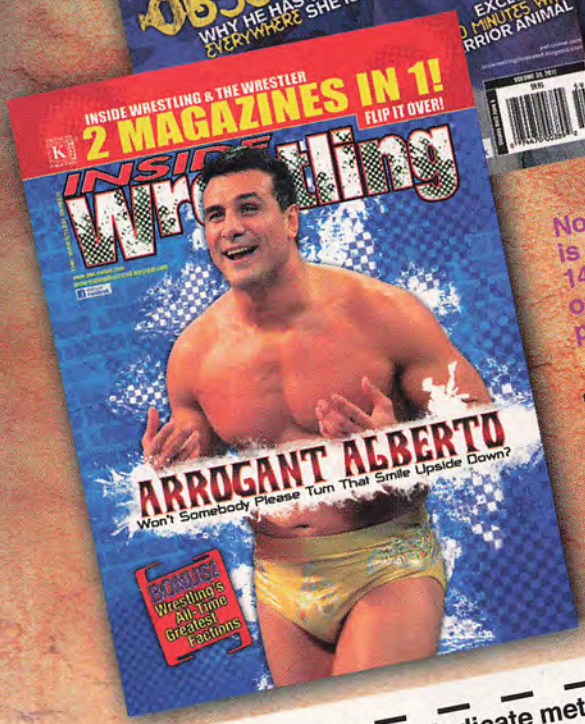

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WIN, LOSE, OR DRAW

BY HARRY BURKETT

MARK CUBAN, OSCAR De La Hoya, and Donald Trump envy Vince McMahon. He has transformed corporate branding into an art form, gets his message directly to his consumers without a media filter, and keeps firm control over access and information related to his product.

Despite their renowned successes—and one could argue that Cuban, De La Hoya, and Trump are all more famous than McMahon—each of these Type-A, alpha male types wish they could maintain the same measure of control over their empires as McMahon lords over WWE.

A couple of months ago, Mark Cuban—the charismatic owner of the Dallas Mavericks basketball team and HDNet, among other properties—was thinking about banning some sports website reporters, including those from ESPN and Yahoo, from the Mavericks' locker room. And he wasn't considering the move out of any sort of anger or malice. He simply considered it a common sense and strategic business decision.

He wrote this on his blog: "I think we have finally reached a point where not only can we communicate any and all factual information from our players and team directly to our fans and customers as effectively as any big sports website, but I think we have also reached a point where are our interests are no longer aligned."

Cuban's point is that teams once needed the sports media—ESPN reporters, newspaper columnists, etc.—to generate interest. Now teams like the Mavericks can communicate with their fans directly via Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other social networking devices. So why should he allow ESPN and Yahoo reporters free access to the Mavericks' locker room when they aren't necessarily going to portray the Mavericks in the best possible light? Indeed, Cuban believes that restricting access to mainstream reporters will increase the value of the Mavericks' own media platforms. And he maintains that, increasingly, sports reporters are under more pressure to come up with a sensational or negative headline because their next Twitter feed is due in about five minutes.

The Mavericks owner is extremely media savvy and I wouldn't be surprised if he came to most of these conclusions on his own. But I have to assume that Cuban, who usually sits in the front row whenever *Raw* comes to Dallas, must be admiring Vince McMahon's handiwork from afar.

McMahon is a genius at using multimedia platforms and branding to control information. While you might see Cuban backstage at a WWE event, you're probably not going to see reporters from the *Dallas Morning News*. WWE sources have confirmed over the years that McMahon firmly believes his most powerful tool is being able to control access to his talent. If a mainstream reporter wants an interview with John Cena,

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Seated ringside for a Raw event, the Dallas Mavericks billionaire owner Mark Cuban has some words with Cody Rhodes. Cuban is toying with the idea of banning the media from the Mavericks' locker room, a move that the NBA surely will not permit.

Photo by Tommy Baynard/NBC

Donald Trump and Vince McMahon have a lot more in common than having beautiful daughters (Ivanka, pictured). Both have used their guile to build billion-dollar empires. Though Trump never had his head shaved, he has much to envy McMahon for.

who is "proud to represent his product," as he told The Rock, there's no chance of pulling him aside near the soda machine. One must go through a certain amount of red tape with the public relations office. I know from personal experience that these are very nice people, but it's still a safeguard nonetheless.

At the very beginning of WWE's global expansion, McMahon decided he wouldn't be dependent on shaping media coverage. Instead, he would create his own. So what if former Editor Peter King called him a carnival barker! That's why he launched *WWE Magazine* and why he now has wwe.com. Of course, it seems that every media and entertainment company—from Disney to Oprah Winfrey—has its own magazine and website, but McMahon was definitely ahead of the curve.

After Golden Boy Enterprises took over *PWI* and its sister publications in 2007 (before Kappa Publishing reacquired them in 2009), I listened in on a conference call involving Oscar De La Hoya and Golden Boy CEO Richard Schaefer in which both men expressed admiration for how McMahon had used WWE to take over the wrestling industry and was using a multi-platform approach to maximize every revenue stream. Acquiring *The Ring* boxing magazine from Kappa was part of that strategy, but, in a move that was very unlike Vince McMahon, De La Hoya insisted that *The Ring* remain absolutely objective and not show favoritism toward Golden Boy or its fighters.

Hey, maybe Oscar isn't ruthless enough to take over the world, but he was smart enough to realize that Golden Boy's future was not just in managing boxers, but in creating pay-per-view business and mastering the media component.

And we know that Donald Trump and Vince McMahon are kindred spirits. On the recent *True History Of WrestleMania* DVD, Trump spoke of McMahon's business acumen with glowing reverence. The parallels between these two men are remarkable, dating back to when Trump and McMahon were two young bulls in the '80s and striking deals to host back-to-back WrestleManias at Trump Plaza. And Trump's recent shock-and-awe approach to teasing a presidential campaign was chock full of Vince tactics.

But there was one problem with that. Creating controversy was enough for Trump to top some presidential polls, but he wasn't able to control the message as he had done within the safe confines of The Trump Organization. Likewise, McMahon firmly controls WWE and its marketing efforts, but he tends to bomb when he ventures out of that realm. XFL, Bob Costas, anyone?

Yet McMahon enjoys advantages that Cuban, De La Hoya, and Trump do not. He created an empire out of a closed industry. McMahon's top priority upon the big expansion in 1984 was establishing WWE as entertainment, thereby loosening the regulations of state athletic commissions. De La Hoya will always have to contend with that issue. Cuban owns the Mavericks, but he still must operate within the confines of the NBA. Trump must deal with real-estate regulations, and even the mighty Donald showed a bit of weakness when he claimed that his commitment to NBC Universal and his *Celebrity Apprentice* deal was a factor in his not running for President.

I'm not suggesting that McMahon has no restrictions. WWE is a public company and McMahon takes pride in the fact that he runs an above-board operation. The Trump Organization is a private company and Trump himself is notoriously secretive about his finances. McMahon's are pretty much out there every quarter, down to his salary and WWE stock holdings.

All of these entrepreneurs admire McMahon because he controls his own destiny. That's quite a compliment, coming from three men who have built their reputations on shaping their own. And I think the entire WWE Universe would agree with that. □

THE STRAIGHT SHOOTER

BY DAN MURPHY

NOSTALGIA FAIRS AND wrestling reunions have become rather popular in recent years, but the Cauliflower Alley Club reunion is the granddaddy of them all.

Originally created in 1965 as a club for pro wrestlers, boxers, actors, and stunt men, the organization has evolved through the years, focusing almost entirely on wrestling. Named in honor of founder Mike Mazurki's iconic cauliflower ear, the club is built upon the premise of a "ring of friendship." When you show up at a CAC reunion, you leave any "heat" or bad blood at the door, and concentrate on making new friends.

This year, I had the opportunity to attend my first Cauliflower Alley reunion at the Gold Coast Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. I checked into the hotel, then made my way past the Pai Gow Poker tables and grannies at the slot machines up to the registration table, where I was immediately greeted with a bearhug from Cheerleader Melissa/Alissa Flash. (*Note to Stu Saks: Put this in my rider for all future events—When I travel, I always want a hug from Cheerleader Melissa upon my arrival.*)

Melissa is an active ambassador for the CAC and a former recipient of the Club's "Future Legend Award," which is voted upon by club officers, including President Nick Bockwinkel.

"I'm happy you could make it, Dan," Melissa said. "This is such a great club and great event. I promise, after this, you'll be hooked and you'll come back every year."

Considering my fondness for drink and attraction to blackjack, that could be an expensive proposition, given that the event is held annually in Sin City.

In recent years, the CAC has taken steps to become more fan-friendly. While the organization was once exclusive to members, the reunion is now open to the public, giving regular fans an opportunity to hob-nob with some of the sport's biggest stars. As I milled around the gimmick tables of the nostalgia fair, smiling at some old collector's issues of *PWI* (including issues where I had written the cover story, which is an odd feeling), Bockwinkel, Jake "The Snake" Roberts, The Destroyer, Ted DiBiase Sr., B. Brian Blair, Bob Orton Sr., and several other stars from the past came and went, pausing for photos, swapping stories, and sharing laughs.

After catching up with The Destroyer and Greg Oliver of SLAM! Wrestling, I snuck down to the sports book to watch the detestable Flyers upend my beloved Buffalo Sabres, then went back upstairs for a cocktail reception, which gave fans and wrestlers another chance to mingle.

The next morning, I attended a session on "Babyfaces, Heels, And Turns," given by J.J. Dillon and psychologist Dr. David Reiss. It was an informative discussion on the psychology of wrestling, including Dillon breaking down the Tully Blanchard/Baby Doll split of 1986. Dillon showed clips of the five weeks of television leading into the split and the subsequent Tully/Dusty Rhodes feud. I'm not ashamed to admit I got goose bumps watching the storyline unfold.

"I had never seen that footage before," Bockwinkel said after Dillon had finished his presentation.

Photo by George Napolitano

Smashing Pumpkins front man Billy Corgan was very excited to rub elbows with some of his wrestling heroes at the 2011 Cauliflower Alley Club reunion, as was Senior Writer Dan Murphy.

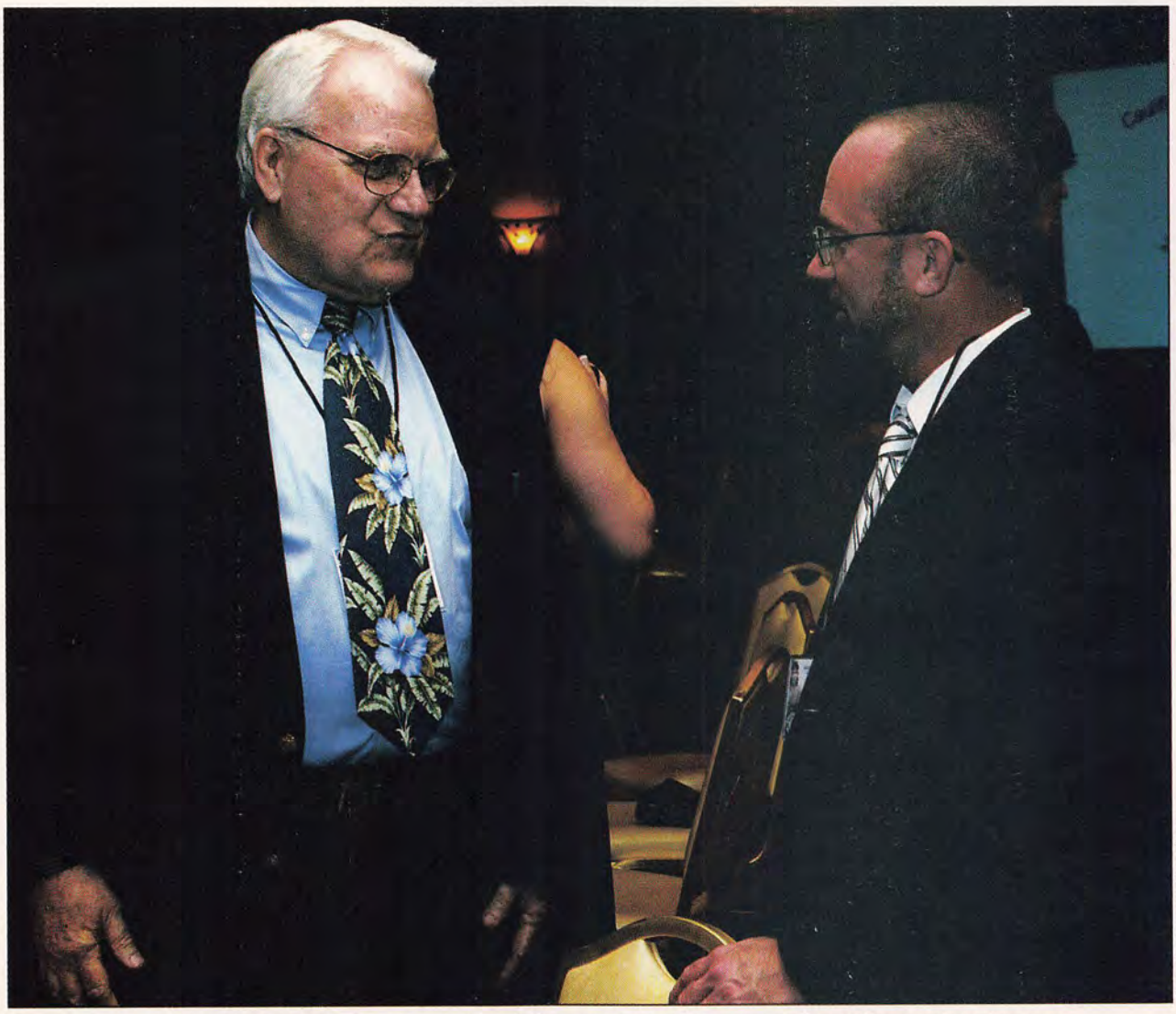


Photo by George Napolitano

J. J. Dillon delivered what some considered the most interesting presentation of the event on ring psychology. As one of wrestling's all-time best managers, Dillon is an authority on the subject.

"If I had seen it back in my wrestling days, I would have stolen every part of it!"

From there, it was time for a dip in the pool. Word of advice: If you want to look like hot stuff at poolside, don't make the mistake of lying out at the same time as Rick Martel. The man has still got it, and the bathing beauties certainly took notice.

That night, a thoroughly sunburned Murph hit up The Baloney Blow-Out, an informal dinner and awards ceremony, highlighted by Terry Funk presenting Mick Foley with the Art Abrams Lifetime Achievement Award.

I was happy to see that WWE sent a delegation to this year's event, including DiBiase, Jim Ross, Jerry Brisco, Sunny, and Ricky Steamboat. They were on hand the following night to see Sgt. Slaughter get roasted by Roddy Piper as Piper presented Sarge with The Iron Mike Award, the club's top prize.

In the midst of all those living legends, it was great to see some younger active wrestlers, including Adam Pearce, The Sheik, and Matt Riviera, getting involved in the festivities.

A personal highlight came during the closing dinner when Billy Corgan, lead singer of The Smashing Pumpkins, snuck in and sat at the table next to me as a guest of the GLOW girls, who were attending the reunion for the first time (and, yes, Hollywood still looks as foxy as ever). Corgan is a big wrestling fan—and a *PWI* fan, he says—and he and I made small talk like a couple of star-struck fan-boys. When Corgan noticed Mil Mascaras seated at my table, his eyes widened in delight. "This is awesome," he whispered. "I know," I whispered back.

It was three days of surreal moments (such as "The Boogie Woogie Man" Jimmy Valiant seeing me off for the night with "Sleep well and sweet dreams, my brother," and watching Mascaras eating filet mignon (with his mask on) and pure pro wrestling fandom. The Cauliflower Alley Club does it right. Melissa, you were right. I am hooked. I'll look forward to your hug next year. □

You're at the airport. You see your favorite wrestler relaxing in one of the terminals. You rush up to him or her as questions fill your excited mind. There are certain things you just have to know about this person. Well, these are the **12 questions** you'd never think of asking

12 QUESTIONS

BRITTANY FORCE

1

How often do you get mistaken for funny car driver Brittany Force?

Never. Most of the time, fans only find out that there's a racecar driver named Brittany Force when they Google me.

2

What was your first reaction when you saw that you had made the 2010 "*PWI* Female 50"?

I remember I was flipping through the magazine in Wal-Mart. I was getting to the end and then I saw my picture. The first person I texted was Jessicka Havoc, because she was 46 and I was 47. Then I looked around to make sure no one was looking as my eyes welled up and the tears began rolling down my cheeks.

3

Gift cards: Practical gift or lazy gift?

I *love* gift cards. That's my favorite gift, especially to restaurants. I like to eat.

4

Complete the following sentence: If Brittany Force weren't a wrestler, she would be _____.

Probably a football player. I never would have quit football if it weren't for wrestling.

5

What advice would you give someone considering a tattoo?

Do it. Make it meaningful, something that represents where you are in your life right now.

6

You played football with the Pittsburgh Force women's team. Which was more physical, football or wrestling?

I had to take bumps in both sports. I would say they're equally physical.

7

Does the Insane Clown Posse belong in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame?

First of all, they're rap, not rock. And they're not just any rap, they're underground. But us Juggalos and Juggalettes consider them the very best.

8

What is the strangest thing you have ever seen in a wrestling locker room?

(*laughs*) A lot of naked men doing weird naked things.

9

What is the best advice you ever received?

Keep your head up and stay focused.

10

What is the weirdest thing a fan has ever said to you?

Wow. The weird question I get the most is, "What is your bra size?" I probably get asked that about 20 times a week.

11

What is your least favorite part of your workout routine?

I work out five days a week at Evolution Gym. Let's face it, you can't get fit in a snap. My pet peeve is having to listen to people talk when I'm trying to work out. If you want to make it in my new promotion, NexGen Wrestling, you have to be in shape.

12

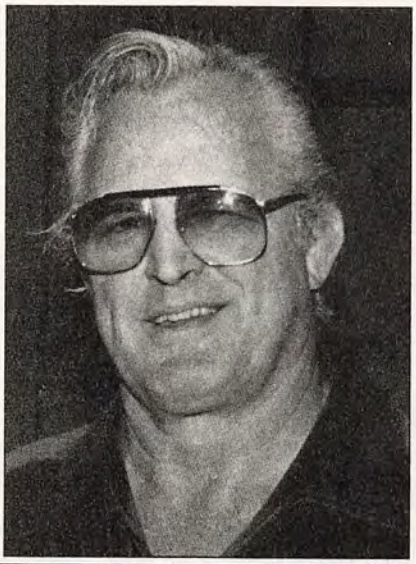
If *PWI* Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda were to ask you out, how would you politely—but firmly—turn him down?

Frank is a great guy, but he's married, and he knows that I have a completely gorgeous boyfriend at home. So, I doubt Frank would ask me out.

Photo by Kevin Slonka

THE WRESTLING OBSERVER

HALL OF FAME



EDDIE GRAHAM

In each issue, *PWI* will honor one member of *The Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame, which we recognize as the sport's official Hall of Fame

EDDIE GRAHAM WAS a complicated man.

He was an accomplished amateur wrestler who successfully made the transition to the ring, becoming a major draw in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. He had a head for the wrestling business and became the promoter for Championship Wrestling from Florida and served as the president of the National Wrestling Alliance.

In the ring, he could make the fans love him or call for his head. But outside of the ring, Graham was a philanthropist and was active in numerous charities, including the Florida Sheriff's Boys Ranch and Girls Villa, Eddie Graham's Youth Camp near Tampa, and the Boys Club.

He took his own life in 1985 at the age of 55.

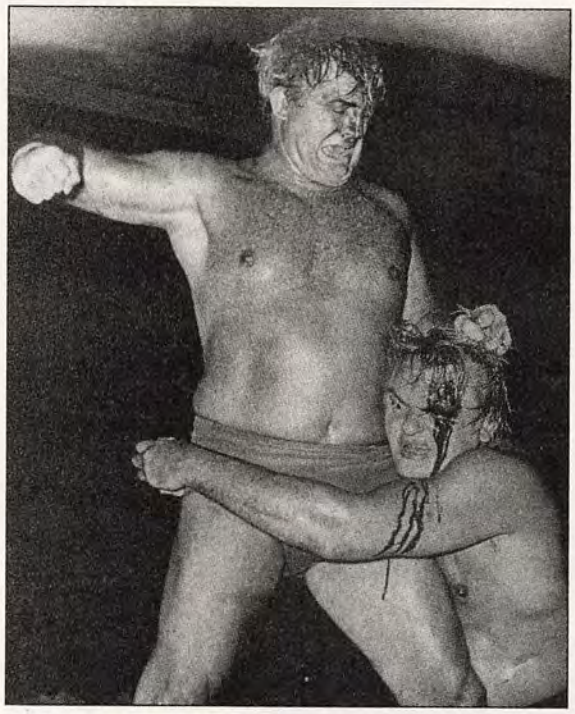
Born Edward Gossett, he was an athletic youth, despite being blind in one eye. He discovered amateur wrestling at the local YMCA in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He was trained by Cowboy Luttrell and made his pro wrestling debut in 1947 at the age of 17. As payment for the match, he received a 25-pound turkey.

He wrestled under several names, including Roy Rogers, billed as the brother of "Nature Boy" Buddy Rogers. With his bleached blond hair and muscular build, Gossett bore a striking resemblance to Rogers.

In 1958, he met Jerry Graham and the two decided to form a team. Gossett adopted the name Eddie Graham and moved to New York, where they competed as The Golden Grahams. The Grahams were an instant sensation, quickly becoming the top heel tag team in the territory and winning the Capitol Sports U.S. tag team title four times between 1958 and 1960 while feuding with teams like The Fabulous Kangaroos and Antonino Rocca and Miguel Perez.

Though the Grahams had chemistry in the ring, they didn't always get along outside of the ring. In 1960, Eddie decided to move down to Florida. He continued wrestling in tag teams, winning the NWA Florida tag team title several times, teaming with Ike Eakins, Sam Steamboat, Bob Orton, and Dick Steinborn. He also invested in the territory, buying a portion of the company in 1961. In March 1962, he won a tournament to win the NWA (Florida) Southern heavyweight title, which he would hold three times.

Graham's championship success wasn't limited to the U.S. He teamed with Killer Karl Kox to win



Graham was one of wrestling's bloodiest villains, as this gore fest with Johnny Valentine proved. However, Graham also had a soft spot for children and was active in many youth charities.

Sen. Richard Stone presents Graham with an American flag that once flew atop the White House. For his contributions to the youth and sports of Florida, Graham was celebrated as a philanthropist. However, he was also deeply depressed and took his own life in 1985.

the All-Asia tag team title in 1966.

In 1968, Graham suffered severe injuries in a freak accident when a 75-pound steel window fell on his head as he was lacing his boots in the locker room. Graham suffered torn retinas in both eyes and required 300 stitches in his head and face. The injury kept him out of wrestling for more than a year.

Graham took over booking and promoting duties for Championship Wrestling From Florida in 1971. He proved to be a successful promoter, helping build Florida into one of the top territories in the country. Graham was known for his keen attention to detail and his well-crafted and realistic storylines, and was considered one of the most influential promoters of the 1970s. With Gordon Solie calling the action, *Championship Wrestling From Florida* became one of the top wrestling television programs in the country.

Graham also introduced his son, Mike, to the wrestling business, teaming with him to win the NWA Florida tag team title in 1976.

That year, Graham was elected president of the NWA. In 1977, Graham retired from in-ring competition due to his deteriorating health (though he did wrestle one final match in 1979). He became more active in charities, especially organizations that introduced young men to athletics and wrestling.

"God gave me a decent enough body to be an athlete. That put me in the public eye," Graham once said in an interview. "Not only did I have obligations to my family, but I feel like I can influence young people."

He donated $10,000 to the University of Florida for the creation of a wrestling room on campus, and the Tampa Sports Club named Graham its Sports Citizen of the Year in 1978. In 1980, Sen. Richard Stone awarded Graham an American flag that had flown over the White House.

But beneath his success, Graham was deeply troubled and depressed. On January 21, 1985, he was found dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Graham was posthumously inducted into both the WCW and WWE Halls of Fame. He is a charter member of *The Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame. □

INDEPENDENT ROUNDUP

BY AL ALVEN

IN WHAT WAS a truly historic occurrence, Jersey All Pro Wrestling hosted New Japan Pro Wrestling's East Coast Invasion Tour over the weekend of May 13-15. Events were held in JAPW's home base of Rahway, New Jersey, as well as New York City and Philadelphia.

The biggest news to come out of the weekend was the crowning of the first-ever IWGP Intercontinental champion. Former WWE star **Montel Vontavious Porter** won an eight-man tournament comprised of top competitors from both companies to claim the title.

He defeated **Toru Yano** in the finals after scoring wins over **Kazuchika Okada** and **Tetsuya Naito** in the first two rounds, respectively. Yano beat **Dan Maff** and **Yujiro Takahashi** to set up the showdown with Porter. **Hideo Saito** and **Josh Daniels** also took part in the tournament.

"It's an absolutely huge honor to become the first-ever IWGP Intercontinental champion and to be standing here with this title belt over my shoulder," said an emotional Porter afterward. "I will wear it proudly and represent both sides of the pond to the best of my ability.

"This was always my dream, to compete internationally, to make my name in Europe, and especially in Japan, as well as here in the States. This is why I left WWE, to broaden my horizons. And here I am, holding this new and very prestigious championship."

The weekend featured several other notable matches, including IWGP heavyweight champion **Hiroshi Tanahashi** defeating **Charlie Haas** in one of the more notable international title defenses in recent memory. Not too far behind was **Prince Devitt's** successful defense of his IWGP junior heavyweight title against **Low-Ki**.

The third and final show in Philadelphia was highlighted by Porter's big tournament win, but the main event saw former IWGP heavyweight champion **Togi Makabe**

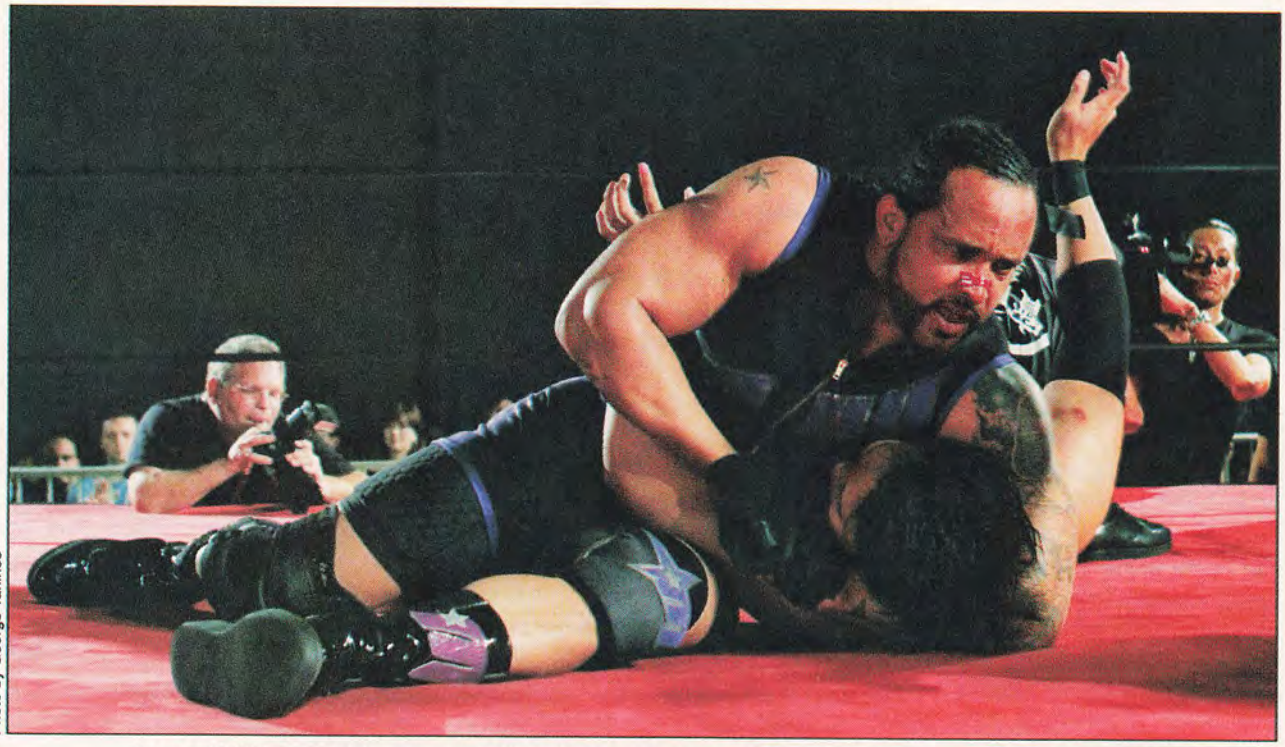


Photo by George Tahinos

Former WWE star MVP, shown wrestling first-round opponent Kazuchika Okada, realized a personal dream when he won the IWGP Intercontinental championship during NJPW's East Coast Invasion tour.

defeat **Rhino** in a hardcore match that sent the fans home happy.

Both promotions were said to be very pleased with the tour as a whole, and a potential return tour for NJPW is already being discussed.

Hulk Hogan made a rare indy appearance on May 14, participating in Championship Wrestling International's Brawl at the Bush II event in Brantford, Ontario. The show was stacked with former WWE, WCW, and ECW talent, including a star-studded main event that saw **Team Beefcake**, which consisted of **Brutus Beefcake**, **Bushwacker Luke**, **Lanny Poffo**, and **Haven** defeat **Ted DiBiase's Million-Dollar Team** of **The Nasty Boys** (**Brian Knobbs** & **Jerry Saggs**), **Virgil**, and **Big Daddy Hammer**.

Photo By Jake Sposetta

After letting The Usual Suspects hold their NWA tag team title belts for two weeks, Kory Chavis (foreground) and Jon Davis took them back. The Dark City Fight Club had held the title for 162 consecutive days before losing to the Suspects.

The finish saw the Nasties double-teaming Beefcake, only for Hogan to get involved and assist his friend, en route to Beefcake becoming the sole survivor of the elimination match.

In the semi-main event: **Scott Steiner** defeated **Kevin Nash** to successfully defend his CWI heavyweight title. The match was unique in that it technically featured a current TNA talent (Steiner) vs. a performer under contract to WWE (Nash, albeit under a Legend's deal).

After **The Usual Suspects** (**A.J. Steele** & **Murder One**) captured the National Wrestling Alliance tag team title from **The Dark City Fight Club** (**Jon Davis** & **Kory Chavis**) at NWA RPW's Memorial Mayhem event, the DCFC promised to reclaim the gold in short order, and did just that, winning the belts back at another NWA RPW show, in Warner Robins, Georgia, just 14 days later.

Davis and Chavis had held the title for 162 days after ending the record 777-day reign of **The Skullkrushers** (**Rasche Brown** & **Keith Walker**) late last year. Now, The Usual Suspects are boasting that they will make quick work of the new champs and become two-time titlists themselves.

In other NWA news, the Alliance's Board of Directors announced that **The Sheik** has been forced to vacate the NWA North American title, by virtue of his NWA heavyweight title victory over **Colt Cabana** back in March.

The Sheik officially held the North American belt for 451 days, having defeated **Apolo** for it back in May 2009. It was determined that the new North American champion will be crowned in a tournament to be held throughout various locations in the NWA over the coming months.

First-round action has already gotten underway, with **Kyle Matthews** defeating **Chip Day** at an NWA Pro South Wrestling event in Piedmont, Alabama; **Shaun Tempers** beating **Caprice Coleman** at an NWA Anarchy show in Cornelia, Georgia; and **Corey Hollis** defeating **JRod** at an NWA Rampage Pro Wrestling-hosted card in Warner Robins, Georgia.

Chris Wylde continues to bide his time. The "Heart Killer" must still wait to finally get his shot at East Coast Wrestling Association heavyweight champion **"Greek God" Papadon**, an opportunity that can't come soon enough.

Back in October, Wylde was scheduled to face then-ECWA champ **Andrew Ryker** for the belt, but Ryker vacated the title and retired due to injury. Wylde went on to win the ECWA Mid-Atlantic title and has run off an impressive undefeated streak. His overall record in ECWA stands at 9-1.

Papadon has been on a roll

since winning the championship from **Mega** in early-March. He has promised not just to defeat Wylde, but to make him "bow" before him, as the war of words between these two begins to heat up.

Matt Saigon and **Damian Dragon** continue to prove their mettle as one of the top young tag teams in the indies. The current Tri-State Wrestling Alliance tag team champions were scheduled to face the **"Midnight Sensations"** of **Chris Rockwell** and **Sam Shields** in a match for the vacant ECWA tag team title, before ECWA Commissioner **DJ Hyde** interjected.

Hyde, in cahoots with ECWA and TWA owner **Mike Tartagilia**, ordered that the TWA belts were to be put on the line as well, just before the bell rang. Saigon and Dragon, who somehow seemed to come prepared for the possibility, worked amazingly well under pressure, and went on to defeat Rockwell and Shields to become the first ever ECWA/TWA Unified tag team champions.

While Hyde's actions in pulling a fast one on Saigon and Dragon had fans of two promotions buzzing, it's nothing compared to what he did to **A.R. Fox** in Combat Zone Wrestling.

As the owner of CZW, Hyde came to ringside as the company's junior heavyweight champion, **Adam Cole**, defended his title against Fox in the main event of Proving Grounds. Hyde's rationale was that Cole had recently stolen a string of victories by dubious means, and he was supposedly there to ensure that a stop was put to it.

Fox took Cole to the limit, and appeared to have the match won after hitting his new finisher, the Mein Pain. But, to the surprise of just about everyone, Hyde entered the ring and blasted the challenger with a devastating lariat, saving Cole's championship.

In the aftermath, Hyde tore into the CZW faithful and former owner **John Zandig**, before both he and Cole were run off by **Sami Callihan**.

Photo by Frank Krewda

Chris Wylde, who continues to rack up wins in ECWA, has remained patient in his quest for a heavyweight title shot. Current champion Papadon, though, feels Wylde is an unworthy adversary.

Callahan then pledged his allegiance to the promotion and struck Zandig's trademark pose, to the delight of the fans.

Back in early-February, 20-year-old **Bo Rotundo** upset **Mason Ryan** to become the youngest man ever to hold the Florida heavyweight title, down in WWE's developmental territory of Florida Championship Wrestling. The only problem was Rotundo lost the title that very same day to **Lucky Cannon** during a set of FCW television tapings. The son of **Mike Rotundo** and younger brother of **Husky Harris**, Rotundo finally gained his revenge on Cannon, defeating his arrogant rival for the belt in a triple-threat match at another tapings marathon at the FCW Arena in Tampa.

Rotundo used his trademark spear to score the win, after which he was joined in celebration by half of the lockerroom. His father and **Dusty Rhodes** also came to ringside to share in the moment.

Just an hour or so later, Rotundo was back in the ring, making his first defense. He would retain the title in a Fatal Four-Way against Cannon, **Richie Steamboat**, and **Leo Kruger**, scoring the pinfall on Kruger after again hitting a spear.

"Wow... it was a whirlwind few hours, what can I say?" explained the humble Rotundo after the tapings. "I had a little taste of what it meant to be the champion before, and now I don't ever want to give this up. I promise to take on all comers, and to make my father, Dusty, and all the fans proud."

In other news from the tapings, company owner **Steve Keirn** relieved **Maxine** of her duties as FCW general manager, replacing her with former WCW favorite **Norman Smiley**.

Also, scenes from *Tough Enough* were filmed, with trainer **Bill DeMott** wrestling finalists **Christina Crawford**, **Luke Robinson**, and **Andy Leavine**, and **Peter Orlov** grappling with **Jeremiah Riggs**, all in exhibition matches.

Alex Anthony upset WXWC4 Ultimate Hybrid champion **Lance Anoai** for the title in early-May, and the loss seemed to rattle the fourth-generation wrestler, who took out his frustration on cousin **Afa Jr.** During Afa's heavyweight title shot against **El Guapo** in the following match, Lance ran out from the dressing room to break up an Afa Jr. pin attempt, and blasted his cousin with a chair shot before the locker room emptied and brawls erupted all over the Mountainside Memorial Auditorium.

Order was eventually restored, but not before Afa Jr. attempted to get his hands on Lance, which prompted **Cobian** to get involved. "I'm not sure if this was **Samu's** idea or Cobian's," Afa Jr. spat. "But Lance will pay for what he did tonight, blood or no blood. And Cobian needs to mind his own damn business!"

Also on the card, WXWC4's women's champion **Niya** retained her title by pinning **Kacee Carlisle** using the ropes for leverage.

RECENT TITLE CHANGES

Deep South Wrestling, Sharon, MS, April 16: The Atomic Kid defeated **Jason Matthews** for the DSW United States title ... **Real Action Wrestling, Barberton, OH, April 26: Barry Sagitarious** beat **Trystan Tyler** for the RAW Heritage championship ... **Championship International Wrestling, Edon, OH, April 30: The War Machines** (**Nitro** & **Mauler**) beat **The Thoroughbreds** (**Kris Korvis** & **Aaron Orion**) for the CIW tag team title ... **Chesnee Pro Wrestling, Chesnee, South Carolina, April 30: Will Demented** pinned CPW TV champion **Rob KillJoy** for the title ... **Mill City Wrestling, Lowell, MA, April 29: Slyck Wagner Brown** beat **D.C. Dillinger** for the MCW heavyweight title ... **Powerhouse Wrestling, Auburn, MA, April 30: Anthony Michaels** & **Mark Gore** defeated PW tag team champions **Gino Martino** & **Tommy Mack** to win the title ... **Gold Rush Wrestling, Carson City, NV, May 6: Johnny X** beat **Masked Eagle** in a Coal Miner's Glove match to win the GRW title ... **APW Wrestling, Statesboro, GA, May 7: Cujo** pinned **Scotty Bullwinkle** to become the new APW champion ... **The United Kings** beat Cujo & **TITAN** for the APW tag team title ... **River City Wrestling, San Antonio, TX, May 7: JoJo Bravo** pinned **Yo-Hey** to win the RCW International title ... **Alissa Flash** & **Darci Drake** beat **San Antonio's Most Unwanted** (**Joey Spector**, **Nemesis**, & **Pink**) for the RCW tag team title in a Fan Lumberjack Strap Match ... **Eastern Pro Wrestling, Westerly, RI, May 14: Giant Turtle Power** (**"The Giant" Rob Aruajo** & **Steven "The Turtle" Weiner**) beat **The Prestige** (**"H20" Ryan Waters** & **Matt Magnum**) to win the EPW tag team title ... **SoCal Pro Wrestling, Oceanside, CA, May 14: 2 Skinny White Guys** (**Nick Lovin** & **Peter Avalon**) defeated **Kid Caramba** & **Todd Chandler** to become the new SCP tag team champions. □

Photo by Frank Krewda

May 8 was a strange day for WXWC4's Lance Anoai, who lost his Ultimate Hybrid title to Alex Anthony (pictured), and later attacked his cousin Afa Jr. during the heavyweight title main-event match. WXWC4 fans were shocked by the popular Anoai's behavior.

THE INTERNATIONAL REPORT

BY BILL MELTZER

WITH THE DEPARTURE of lucha libre megastar **Mistico** to WWE as **Sin Cara**, there has been a bit of a power vacuum created in CMLL that has yet to be filled. After publicly denying that it would suffer much from the loss of the crossover star (who was so popular in Mexico that a successful comic book series and mainstream pop music video were made in his honor), CMLL has attempted a new strategy to reduce the impact. Since CMLL owns the character name and likeness within Mexico, it has created a new Mistico.

It remains to be seen if the strategy will work. WWE failed miserably and suffered embarrassment when it unconvincingly attempted to foist "fake" **Diesel** and **Razor Ramon** characters on the fans after the departures of **Kevin Nash** and **Scott Hall** to WCW, while Japanese fans have come to accept the publicly acknowledged passing of the torch from one **Tiger Mask** to the next. Within Mexico, character cloning has had a mixed history of success, with AAA's replacement **La Parka** being perhaps the most controversial and enduring example of a copied character eventually winning acceptance.

Photo by Vern Verna

Former TNA and current AAA wrestler, Konnan, has been critical of a recent talent exchange deal between the promotions, claiming that Jeff Jarrett cannot and should not be trusted.

The new Mistico was recently slated to make his debut in Arena Mexico. Not so coincidentally, WWE ran a competing show in Mexico City on the same night with the rechristened Sin Cara wrestling in the semi-main event. At the last minute, CMLL decided to wait to debut its replacement Mistico. Supposedly, the company has decided to ease the new character in more slowly with the fans in order to increase the chance of his widespread acceptance.

CMLL arch-rival promotion AAA recently announced that TNA Knockouts **Angelina Love**, **Velvet Sky**, and champion **Mickie James** would be brought in to team up with **Sexy Star** in an eight-woman tag team match against **Fabi** and **Mari Apache**, **Lolita**, and **Cinthia Moreno**.

The ever-outspoken **Konnan** has gone on record to oppose the cooperative ventures in Mexico between AAA and TNA. Specifically, he has taken issue with the idea of **Jeff Jarrett** working a storyline alliance with **La Sociedad**. In a recent interview, Konnan accused Jarrett of mistreating LAX and other Latino and minority employees. Konnan, who sued TNA in 2008 claiming discrimination, also said that, because of Jarrett's key role in TNA, he has no respect for the company or other wrestlers who continue to work for AAA. Konnan said that La Sociedad leader **Dorian Roldan** will someday regret trusting Jarrett.

The Mexican national postal service recently held a big ceremony to introduce a postage stamp series bearing the likeness of legendary **Mil Mascaras**. "The Man Of A Thousand Masks" is featured in three different designs. In addition to the honoree himself, the lucha libre luminaries in attendance included **El Hijo del Santo** and Mascaras' brother, **Dos Caras**. The former, along with his father, the late El Santo, were previously honored with their own stamps.

Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

The war of words between former IWGP champion Shinsuke Nakamura (pictured battling Satoshi Kojima) and current champ Hiroshi Tanahashi has heated up. Nakamura says the winner of the upcoming Tanahashi-Hirooki Goto match must face him. Tanahashi maintains that Nakamura has already squandered his title shots.

Following the conclusion of New Japan's Invasion tour of the United States, former WWE star **MVP** wasted little time defending his newly created IWGP Intercontinental championship in Japan in a series of matches against **Toru Yano**. It has been widely rumored that **Rhino** would head to Japan to challenge fellow *gaijin* MVP for the belt. In the meantime, after staging a televised sneak-attack on **Kojima**, **Lance Archer** (formerly WWE's **Vance Archer** and TNA's **Lance Hoyt**) has been feuding with Kojima in both singles matches and tag team action. Recently, Kojima teamed up with brawler **Togi Makabe** to take on the team of Archer and **Minoru Suzuki**.

In the meantime, IWGP heavyweight champion **Hiroshi Tanahashi** has been concentrating on his ongoing title challenges from **Hirooki Goto**. Three-time former IWGP titlist **Shinsuke Nakamura** has put both Tanahashi and the self-professed "new and improved" Goto on alert, saying that whoever emerges with the belt will have to face him next. Tanahashi retorted by reminding Nakamura that he has already been granted title matches and was unsuccessful in winning the belt.

Pro Wrestling NOAH has set its sights on making inroads in Europe. The company recently held a mini-tour of the United Kingdom dubbed European Navigation. Most notably, GHC heavyweight champion **Takashi Sugiura** successfully defended his title against GHC junior heavyweight champion **Kotaro Suzuki**, while former Ring of Honor tag team champions **The Kings of Wrestling** (**Chris Hero** and **Claudio Castagnoli**) made the trip to defeat the team of **Takeshi Morishima** and **Shuhei Taniguchi**. Other NOAH notables who appeared on the tour included three-time former GHC junior heavyweight champion **Kenta Kobayashi**, **Katsuhiko Nakajima**, **Atsushi Aoki**, and **Ricky Marvin**.

As part of the NOAH tour, former All Star Wrestling British heavyweight champion and European Champion **James Mason** took on American wrestler and MMA competitor **Bobby Fish**. In a match wrestled almost exclusively in the traditional U.K. mat-based style of holds, switches, and counters, Fish (who was originally trained by the legendary **Harley Race**) more than held his own. After numerous two-counts, Mason suddenly dropped down on Fish as the American attempted a **Bob Backlund**-style roll-up, and scored the winning pinfall.

Former WWE star **Tatanka** recently appeared on several shows in Germany promoted by ACW Pro and is slated to make additional appearances over the remainder of the year. In the meantime, brawler **Ulf "The Animal" Herman** has returned to the company in defiance of the stipulations of a loser-leaves-the-company match last year.

After initially being refused reentry by ACW management, "Herman The German" was re-instated under "emergency conditions" in response to the control that ACW heavyweight champion **Eric Black**, his mentor **Argjend Qufaj**, and the rest of the Qufaj's **Revolution** faction have established over the promotion. Herman has been teaming with former enemy **Nok Su Kau** to take on Black and Qufaj. Herman has also called on **Tatanka** and other fan favorites to assist in his efforts. □

ARENA REPORTS

We encourage promoters and readers to e-mail results to:

PWIResults@yahoo.com

Please try to utilize the exact format you see in the "Arena Reports." Also, please distinguish between handicap matches and three- or four-way matches. And, when reporting the result of a handicap match, indicate the number of competitors and who was the last man eliminated. Finally, please note pinfall finishes. Following these guidelines will help us greatly and make it more likely that your report will be used.

SPOTLIGHT CARD OF THE MONTH

NEW JERSEY

VORHEES—ECWA Super 8 Tournament at the Flyers Skate Zone: ***Non-tournament matches:*** **Mr. Ooh La La** won a battle royal, last eliminating **Sean Royal** and **Mozart Fontaine** ... **Papadon**, **Chris Wylde**, & **Team MackTion** defeated **Josh Daniels**, **Matt Saigon**, & **Damian Dragon** in a handicap match ... **Ace Darling** pinned **Aden Chambers** ... ***Super 8, Round 1:*** **Adam Cole** pinned **Sami Callihan** ... **Austin Aries** pinned **Bobby Shields** ... **Tommaso Ciampa** pinned **Rich Swann** ... **Shiima Xion** pinned **Shockwave the Robot**; ***Semifinals:*** Adam Cole pinned Austin Aries ... Tommaso Ciampa beat Shiima Xion by submission; ***Finals:*** Tommaso Ciampa pinned Adam Cole.
(04-30-11)

—Spotlight photos by George Tahinos

UNITED STATES

ALABAMA

DOTHAN—WWE Raw at the Dothan Civic Center: **Evan Bourne** pinned **Dolph Ziggler** ... **Percy Watson** pinned **Zack Ryder** ... **Mason Ryan** defeated **Primo** ... **Jack Swagger** defeated **Chris Masters** ... **The Bella Twins** beat **Eve Torres** in a handicap match ... **Rey Mysterio Jr.** & **Kofi Kingston** beat **Alberto Del Rio** & **CM Punk** ... WWE champion **John Cena** defeated **The Miz**.
(05-06-11)

—Brad Bollin

ARKANSAS

HOT SPRINGS—TNA at the Summit Arena: **Crimson** defeated **Abyss** ... **Velvet Sky** defeated **Sarita** ... **Scott Steiner** beat **Eric Young** ... World tag team champions **Beer Money Inc.** (**James Storm** & **Robert Roode**) defeated **Matt Hardy** & **Chris Harris** ... **AJ Styles** & **Brother Devon** defeated **Bully Ray** & **Tommy Dreamer** ... **Mr. Anderson** beat **Jeff Jarrett**.
(05-07-11)

—Robert Kapchan

FORT SMITH—TNA at the Convention Center: **Crimson** defeated **Abyss** ... **Velvet Sky** defeated **Sarita** ... **Scott Steiner** beat **Eric Young** ... World tag team champions **Beer Money Inc.** (**James Storm** & **Robert Roode**) defeated **Matt Hardy** & **Chris Harris** ... **AJ Styles** & **Brother Devon** defeated **Bully Ray & Tommy Dreamer** ... **Mr. Anderson** beat **Jeff Jarrett**.
(05-06-11)

— Robert Kapchan

HARRISON—Mid-States Wrestling at the Fairgrounds Indoor Expo Building: **Dustin Heritage** defeated Independent Wrestling International champion **Gary Gram** for the title ... Southern tag team champions **Doomsday** defeated **S.L.U.G.G.** ... **Ryan Kelly** beat **El Matador Dos** ... Heavyweight champion **Michael Barry** defeated **The Canadian Red Devil** ... **Adrian Steel** beat **Jim Fallon** by DQ ... **Beautiful Bobby** defeated **Little Kato**.
(04-16-11)

—Kel Varnson

CALIFORNIA

SIMI VALLEY—Millennium Pro Wrestling at The Hubb: **Fern Owen** pinned **Freddy Bravo** ... **Nikki** pinned **Lucky Pierre** ... **Whiskey Fists MacIntosh** pinned **Hellkid** ... **Under Pressure** defeated Maximum champion **Lethal Logan X** by countout ... **Jeremy Jaeger** beat **Brandon Parker**, **Chris Kadillak**, and **Peter Avalon** in a four-way ... **Roger Ruiz** pinned **Omar Duncan** ... **Bo Cooper** defeated **Mario Banks** by DQ ... Heavyweight champion **Ryan Taylor** beat **Akira Tozawa** by submission.
(05-07-11)

—Chad Simplicio

ANAHEIM—Mach-1 Wrestling at the American Sports Center: **Jarek Matthews** pinned **Todd Chandler** ... **Johnny Goodtime** defeated **Johnny Saovi** by submission ... **Kyle Webb** pinned **Luis Tapia** ... **Willie Mack** pinned **Eric Cross** ... **Ridiculoso** pinned **Mr. Biggz** ... **Joey Ryan** pinned **Brandon Parker**.
(05-06-11)

—Chad Simplicio

ANAHEIM—Mach-1 Wrestling at the American Sports Center: **Brian Weston** pinned **Luis Tapia** ... **Cole-ilition** (**Leo Blaze** & **Josh Rozay**) defeated **Eric Cross** & **Johnny Saovi** ... **Cedric the Hitman** beat **Angel Lopez** by submission ... **Jarek Matthews** pinned **Riki De La Paz** ... Heavyweight champion **James Morgan** pinned **Andrew Hellman**.
(04-29-11)

—Chad Simplicio

COVINA—Empire Wrestling Federation at the Knights of Columbus: **Freddy Bravo** defeated **Mercurio Jr.** ... American champion **Terex** defeated **Red Thunder** ... **Eddie Mattson** beat **Ray Rosas** ... **Brandon Gatson** & **SoCal Crazy** defeated **Tommy Wilson** & **Rico Dynamite** ... **The A-List** (**Jeremy Jaeger** & **Roger Ruiz**) beat **The Bar Room Saints** (**D.K. Murphy** & **Joshua Dunbar**) ... Heavyweight champion **Ryan Taylor** vs. **Johnny Starr** ended in a no-contest.
(04-29-11)

—Wade Needham

CHINO—Insane Wrestling League at American Legion Post #299: **Chris Kadillak** defeated **Ray Rosas**, **Joseph Knox**, and **Simon Lotto** in a four-way ... **Amanda** pinned **Lucky O'Shea** to win the W.I.L.D. Women's championship ... **Justin Ryke** pinned **Tyler Jenkins** ... **Johnny Saovi** pinned **Riki De La Paz** ... Tag team champions **Mixtape Kings** (**Jerome Robinson** & **Jacob Diez**) defeated **RockNES Monsters** (**Johnny Yuma** & **Johnny Goodtime**) ...

Sami Callahan had chopped Adam Cole across the chest one too many times, and the look on Cole's face says, "No more!" Adam took this opening-round match with a Panama Sunrise in 12:10.

Anarchy champion **Cothern** pinned **Jeremy Buck** ... **Eric Cross** beat **Paul London** and **Joey Ryan** in a three-way to win the heavyweight championship.
(04-22-11)

—Chad Simplicio

OCEANSIDE—SoCal Pro Wrestling at the Boys & Girls Club: **Manimal** pinned **Rexx Reed** ... **Anchors Away** (**David E. Jones** & **Ryan Stone**) defeated **Frosted Tip Warriors** (**Ryan Kidd** & **Eddie Randall**) ... **Ricky Mandel** pinned **Hector Canales** ... **RockNES Monsters** (**Johnny Yuma** & **Johnny Goodtime**) beat **2 Skinny White Guys** (**Nick Lovin** & **Peter Avalon**) ... **Damage Control** (**Destro** & **Duke**) defeated **Kid Caramba** & **Jarek Matthews** ... Heavyweight champion **Tommy Wilson** beat **Vance Lamborghini**, **Nightmare Azteca**, **Ryan Kidd**, **Eddie Randall**, and **Jason Redondo** in a five-man gauntlet match ... **SoCal Crazy** defeated **Johnny Paradise** by submission.
(04-16-11)

—Chad Simplicio

DELAWARE

NEWARK—ECWA at the Boys & Girls Club ... **AHTU** defeated **The Black Panter** ... **Joe Gacy** won an ECWA Rumble ... **Cindy Rogers** defeated **Jamilia Craft** ... Heavyweight champion **Papadon** defeated **Bazooka Joe** via DQ ... **Kekoa the Flyin' Hawaiian** beat **Jonathan Gresham** ... Mid-Atlantic champion **Chris Wylde** beat Joe Gacy ... Tri-State Wrestling Alliance tag team champions **Damian Dragon** & **Matt Saigon** defeated **ECWA** tag team champions **Christopher Rockwell** & **Sam Shields** to unify the titles.
(05-07-11)

—Joe Zanolle

FLORIDA

ORLANDO—TNA Sacrifice at the Impact Zone: **Mexican America** (**Hernandez** & **Anarquia**) beat **Ink Inc.** (**Jesse Neal** & **Shannon Moore**) ... **Brian Kendrick** pinned **Robbie E** ... Knockouts champion **Mickie James** pinned **Madison Rayne** ... X division champion **Kazarian** pinned **Max Buck** ... **Crimson** pinned **Abyss** ... Tag team champions **Beer Money Inc.** (**James Storm** & **Robert Roode**) beat **Chris Harris** & **Matt Hardy** ... **Tommy Dreamer** pinned **AJ Styles** in a no-DQ match ... **Kurt Angle** & **Chyna** beat **Jeff** & **Karen Jarrett** ... World champion **Sting** pinned **Rob Van Dam**.
(05-15-11)

—Duane Long

ORLANDO—TNA at the Impact Zone: **Mickie James** & **Miss Tessmacher** defeated **Madison Rayne** & **Tara** ... **Sangrieto** pinned **Suicide** ... **Crimson** beat **Abyss** and **Samoa Joe** in a three-way ... **Mr. Anderson** won a 25-man battle royal, last eliminating **Bully Ray**.
(05-12-11)

—Duane Long

PENSACOLA—WWE Smackdown at the Civic Center: **Cody Rhodes** beat **Yoshi Tatsu** ... **Natalya** defeated **Rosa Mendes** ... **Trent Barreta** defeated **Brodus Clay** ... **Kane** & **Ezekiel Jackson** defeated **Justin Gabriel** & **Heath Slater** ... Intercontinental champion **Wade Barrett** beat **Daniel Bryan** ... **Sin Cara** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... World champion **Randy Orton** defeated **Christian** and **Sheamus** in a triple-threat match.
(05-07-11)

—Duane Long

JACKSONVILLE—United States Championship Wrestling at St. John's Square: **Blaine Rage** beat T-Bone Funk ... **The Spirit Kid** beat **Brandon Scherer** ... **Teddy Stigma** defeated **Eddie Graves** ... **Mikey** beat **Jack Hurley** ... U.S. Women's champion **Leva** beat **Santana** by DQ ... **Slyck Sleezy** defeated **John Carino**.
(05-05-11)

—Al Haft

ORLANDO—TNA at the Impact Zone: **Douglas Williams** defeated **Sterling James Keenan** ... **AJ Styles** & **Christopher Daniels** vs. **Bully Ray** & **Gunner** ended in a no-contest ... **Rob Terry** pinned **Murphy** ... Knockouts champion **Mickie James** pinned **Miss Tessmacher** ... **Sangrieto** pinned **Suicide** ... **Kurt Angle** & **Velvet Sky** beat **Jeff Jarrett**, **Angelina Love**, & **Winter** in a handicap match.
(05-05-11)

—Duane Long

ORLANDO—TNA at the Impact Zone: **Angelina Love** beat **Velvet Sky** ... **Anarquia** pinned **Chris Sabin** ... TV champion **Gunner** pinned **Christopher Daniels** ... **Crimson** beat **Samoa Joe** by DQ ... World champion **Sting** beat **Mr. Anderson** and **Bully Ray** in a three-way.
(04-28-11)

—Duane Long

ORLANDO—I Believe in Wrestling at the Downtown Rec Complex: **Jack LeDuc** beat **Cameron Mathews** ... **Brandon Scherer** & **Conner Murphy** beat **Brian Badical** & **Alby Gonzalez** ... **Danny DeManto** beat **Bobby Fonta** ... **Santana** defeated Danny DeManto ... **Mike Cruz** & **Gus Money** beat **Chris Jones** & **Johnny Vandal** ... **Mike Reed** defeated **Milo Beasley** ... **J.D. Amazing** & **Wayne Van Dyke** beat **Rufio Lionhawk** & **Jason Hanley** ... SCW Florida heavyweight champion **Ray Beez** defeated **Q.T. Marshall**.
(04-23-11)

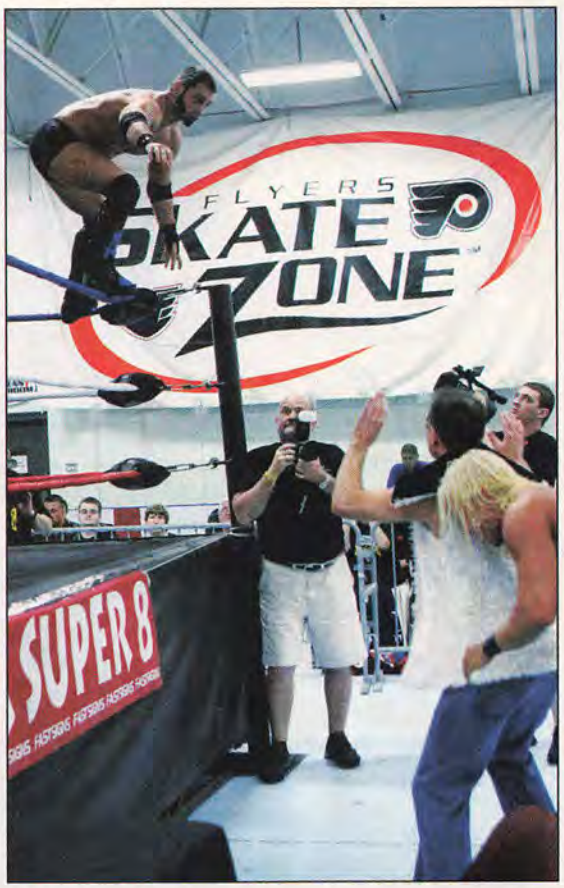
—Al Haft

ORANGE PARK—United States Championship Wrestling at the Orange Park Mall: **Blaine Rage** beat **Jake Slater** ... **Santana** defeated **The D.T.W. Ninja** ... **Eddie Graves** beat **Mikey** ... **The Spirit Kid** beat **J.D. Amazing** ... Santana defeated **Gorgeous Gary** ... **Buck Chyld** beat **Mike Starling**.
(04-21-11)

—Al Haft

ORLANDO—TNA at the Impact Zone: **Winter** beat **Serena Deeb** ... World tag team champions **Beer Money Inc.** (**James Storm** & **Robert Roode**) beat **Rob Terry** & **Murphy** ... Knockouts tag team champions **Sarita** & **Rosita** defeated **Madison Rayne** & **Tara** ... **Abyss** pinned **Rob Van Dam** ... World champion **Sting** pinned **Matt Hardy**.
(04-21-11)

—Duane Long



Austin Aries hesitates before launching himself at "Beautiful" Bobby Shields until Shields' manager, Magnum, gets out of the way. Aries won this first-round battle with a brainbuster in 15:20.

ORLANDO—TNA at the Impact Zone: **Shawn Daivari** beat **Ricky Reyes** ... **Orlando Jordan** beat **Crimson**, **Jesse Neal**, and **Douglas Williams** in a three-way ... **Matt Hardy** defeated **Kazarian** ... **D'Angelo Dinero**, **Jeff Jarrett**, & **Hernandez** beat **Samoa Joe**, **Kurt Angle**, & **Matt Morgan** ... **Abyss** beat **James Storm** ... **Mr. Anderson** beat **Murphy**, and **Rob Terry** in a gauntlet match, and wrestled to a no-contest with **Bully Ray**.
(04-14-11)

—Duane Long

GEORGIA

STATESBORO—NAWA Pro Wrestling at the 301 North Flea Market: **Jay Smooth** beat **Don Yoder** ... **Devlin Valek** defeated **Joey Kidman** ... **Josh Magnum** defeated **The Mastadon** ... **Big Country** beat **El Diablo Muerte** ... **Vordell Walker** defeated **Tetchi Makuji** ... Vordell Walker, Big Country, & Josh Magnum defeated Tetchi Makuji, Devlin Valek, & The Mastadon by DQ.
(05-07-11)

—Bill Levy

Rich Swann caused considerable damage to Tommaso Ciampa in their 6:55 opening-rounder before falling victim to a Project Ciampa.

MACON—WWE Raw at the Centreplex Coliseum: **Evan Bourne** pinned **Dolph Ziggler** ... **Mason Ryan** pinned **Primo** ... **Chris Masters** beat **Zack Ryder** by submission ... **Jack Swagger** beat **Percy Watson** by submission ... **The Big Show** & **Kofi Kingston** defeated **CM Punk** & **Alberto Del Rio** ... **The Bella Twins** beat **Eve Torres** in a handicap match ... WWE champion **John Cena** pinned **The Miz**.
(05-07-11)

—Tracy Stallard

ATLANTA—Platinum Championship Wrestling at the Masquerade: **Warhorse #94** & **Oscar Worthy** beat **The Konkrete Gorillaz** (**Brian Blaze** & **Geter**) by DQ ... **Mason** defeated **Brandon Kage** by submission ... **Thunder** & **Lightning** (**Chris Ganz** & **Chris Lightning**) beat **The Exotic Ones** (**Rick Michaels** & **Simon Sermon**) ... **Chip Day** pinned **Brian Blaze** ... **Geter** beat **Aisha Sunshine** by DQ ... **Team Heat Machine** (**Curry Kid** & **The Vandal**) defeated **Completely Awesome** (**Zach Daniels** & **Chad Silva**).
(04-27-11)

—George Napolitano

EASTANOLLE—Southern Wrestling Association at The BoonDocks Arena: **Chris Spectra** pinned **Enigma** ... **LiveWire** (**Stevie Bryant** & **Venomous**) defeated **Bad Jack** & **Casanova** ... Vision champion **Jimmy Lee** pinned **Johnny Sonset** ... **Donn E.** & **Ballenger** defeated **Cody Fairview** & **Droxx** ... Women's champion **Alicia Silvers** vs. **Laura Leigh** ended in a no-contest ... U.S. champion **James Boulevard** pinned **Kevin Blue** ... **Dale Dwindle** & **La Costa Nostra** (**Jon Hogan** & **Bam Bam Bradshaw**) defeated **The Rednecks** (**Panhead Nelson** & **Billy Starr**) & **Tommy Sawyer**.
(04-23-11)

—Dale Cleveland

ILLINOIS

BELLEVILLE—Southern Illinois Championship Wrestling at the Belle-Clair Fairgrounds: **LaMarcus Clinton** pinned **David Osborne** ... **Jaysin Static** defeated **Max Archer** ... **The Big Texan** & **Waco** beat **Chaz Wesson** & **Dave Vaughn** ... **Ace Hawkins** pinned **Brandon Espinosa** ... **Gary Jackson** vs. **Kevin X** ended in a double-disqualification ... **Chris Hargas** defeated **Tony Raze** ... **Cowboy Bob Orton** & **Danny Boy Hawkins** beat **Ron Powers** & **Sean Vincent**.
(05-07-11)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

LaSALLE—DREAMWAVE Wrestling at the Knights of Columbus: **Bucky Collins** defeated **Tyler Priegel** ... Tag team champions **Zero Gravity** beat **No Laughing Matter** ... **Shane Hollister** beat **Justice Jones** ... **Dan Lawrence** pinned **Joey Marxx** ... **Ace Martino** beat **Prince Ali** ... **Greg Glover** beat **Waylon Beck** by submission ... **Silas Young** defeated **DTM** ... **Nick Brubaker** defeated **Marshe** ... **Acid** & **Hammett** beat **Austin Roberts** & **Mason Beck**.
(05-07-11)

—J.C. Costilli

CASEYVILLE—High Voltage Wrestling at the VFW Hall: **Brandon Espinosa** beat **Dave Vaughn** and **The Spirit Kid** in a triple-threat ... **The Hooligans** (**Devin** & **Mason Cutter**) defeated **The Lumberjacks** (**Abe** & **Gabe**) ... **K.C. Karrington** pinned **Adam Rich** ... **Billy McNeil**, **OuTtKaSt**, & **Aiden Young** beat **Makaze**, **Jamie Lyte**, & **Urban Luchador** ... **Rick Fuller** defeated **Alexandre Rudolph** by DQ ... **Jeremy Wyatt** beat **Nation**, **Jonathan Gresham**, and **Trent Stone** in a four-corner match to win the vacant NWA Missouri title ... **Mark Sterling** pinned **Larry Zbyszko** ... **Stacey O'Brien** beat **Santana G** ... Rick Fuller won a battle royal.
(04-30-11)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

RED BUD—Independent Hardcore Wrestling at The V Bar & Grill: **Mephisto** pinned **Ace Roberts** ... **Jordan McEntyre** beat **Brandon Espinosa** ... **Chaz Wesson** beat **Alexandre Rudolph** and **Adam Rich** in a triple-threat match ... Illinois champion **Evan Money** beat **The Great Malaki** by DQ ...**Tony Kozina** pinned **Ace Hawkins** ... **Mia Martinez** defeated **The Great Cheyenne** ... **Brandon Aarons** & **Billy McNeil** beat **Cameron Cage** & **K.C. Karrington** ... Cameron Cage defeated heavyweight champion Brandon Aarons for the title.
(04-23-11)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

KENTUCKY

HIGHLANDS—WWE Raw at the Bank of Kentucky Center: **Chris Masters** beat **Jack Swagger** by submission ... **Percy Watson** pinned **Zack Ryder** ... **R-Truth** pinned **Primo** ... **Alberto Del Rio** beat **Evan Bourne** by submission ... **The Big Show** pinned **Mason Ryan** ... Divas champion **Brie Bella** pinned **Eve Torres** ... U.S. champion **Kofi Kingston** pinned **Dolph Ziggler** ... WWE champion **John Cena** pinned **The Miz**.
(05-10-11)

—Dillon Roberts

LOUISIANA

BATON ROUGE—TNA at the River Center Arena: **AJ Styles** beat **Matt Hardy** ... **Velvet Sky** defeated **Sarita** ... **Matt Morgan** defeated **Hernandez** ... World tag team champions **Beer Money Inc.** (**James Storm** & **Robert Roode**) defeated **The British Invasion** (**Douglas Williams** & **Magnus**) ... **Brother Devon** beat **Bully Ray** ... **Mr. Anderson** defeated **Jeff Jarrett**.
(04-30-11)

—Rick Bentley

MASSACHUSETTS

FEEDING HILL—EWA at the Springfield Turnverein: **Brenick O'Brien** beat **Lukas Sharp** ... **Mikaze** pinned **Shane Marvel** ... **Sebastian Reese** defeated **I.M. Valor** ... **Bobby Ocean** & **The Mac** beat **Golden Burke** & **William King** by DQ ... **Alex Cy-**

pher pinned **Brad Hollister** ... **Elia Markopoulous** pinned **Wolfman Banford** ... Tag team champions **The Crimson Dynamos** vs. **The Purists** ended in a double-countout ... Sebastian Reese and Mikaze were declared co-winners of a battle royal for the right to wrestle for the vacant heavyweight championship.
(05-06-11)

—Ron Leon

AUBURN—Powerhouse Wrestling at Periwinkles Bar & Grill: **J. Busta** defeated **Cargill Vinton** ... **Danny Davis** & **Matt Borne** defeated **T.J. Marconi** & **Damien Darling** ... **Alexxis Naveah** defeated Women's champion **Ivy** by DQ ... **Anthony Michaels** & **Mark Gore** defeated tag team champions **Gino Martino** & **Tommy Mack** for the title ... **P.J. Polaco** beat **Jimmy Jact Cash** and **J. Freddie** in a no-DQ three-way ... **Sid Vicious** beat **Josef Von Schmidt**.
(04-30-11)

—Shawn O'Domski

LOWELL—Mill City Wrestling at the Brewery Exchange: **Bare Knuckle Burly** defeated **T.J. Richter** ... **J. Freddie** defeated **Isys Ephex** ... **Mistress Belmont** beat **Ivy** ... **Don Vega** vs. **D.C. Dillinger** ended in a double-DQ ... **Justin Corino** defeated **Scott Reed** ... **Matt** & **Kyle Storm** defeated **Devin Blaze** & **Tommy Trainwreck** ... **Delirious** beat **Bob Evans** ... **Demon Ortiz** & **Jason Rumble** defeated **Kris Pyro** & **Davey Cash** ... **Slyck Wagner Brown** defeated heavyweight champion **D.C. Dillinger** for the title.
(04-29-11)

—Shawn O'Domski

LOWELL—Chaotic Wrestling at the Polish American Veterans Club: **Julian Starr** pinned **Brandon Locke** ... **Psycho** pinned **Scotty Slade** ... **Alex Arion** pinned **Matt Spectro** ... **Chase Del Monte** & **Elia Markopoulos** beat **Fala** & **Kongo** ... **Mikaze** pinned **Taka Suzuki** ... **Alexxis** pinned **Taeler Hendrix** ... **Brian Fury** beat **Handsome Johnny** by DQ.
(04-29-11)

—Dave Ratty

MICHIGAN

DEERBORN—Ring of Honor at the Ford Community & Performing Arts Center: **Uno** & **Harlem Bravados** defeated **N8 Mattson** & **Sir Rik** ... **Michael Elgin** defeated **Andy Ridge** ... **Mike Bennett** beat **Grizzly Redwood** ... **Tommaso Ciampa** defeated **Homicide** ... **Christopher Daniels** beat **Colt Cabana** ... **Jay** & **Mark Briscoe** defeated **The All Night Express** (**Kenny King** & **Rhett Titus**) ... **Roderick Strong** beat **El Generico** ... Tag team champions **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** defeated **Adam Cole** & **Kyle O'Reilly** ... **The Kings of Wrestling** (**Chris Hero** & **Claudio Castagnoli**) defeated **The American Wolves** (**Eddie Edwards** & **Davey Richards**).
(05-06-11)

—Shelly Borkan

MISSISSIPPI

TUPELO—WWE Smackdown at the BancorpSouth Arena: **The Great Khali** beat **Ted DiBiase Jr.** ... **Cody Rhodes** beat **Yoshi Tatsu** ... **Natalya** defeated **Rosa Mendes** ... **Trent Barreta** defeated **Brodus Clay** ... **Kane** & **Ezekiel Jackson** defeated **Justin Gabriel** & **Heath Slater** ... Intercontinental champion **Wade Barrett** beat **Daniel Bryan** ... **Sin Cara** defeated **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... World champion **Randy Orton** defeated **Christian** and **Sheamus** in a triple-threat match.
(05-08-11)

—Pat Geller

BILOXI—TNA at the Mississippi Coast Coliseum: **AJ Styles** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... **Velvet Sky** pinned **Sarita** ... **Matt Morgan** pinned **Hernandez** ... World tag team champions **Beer Money Inc.** (**James Storm** & **Robert Roode**) defeated **The British Invasion** (**Douglas Williams** & **Magnus**) ... **Brother Devon** pinned **Bully Ray** ... **Mr. Anderson** pinned **Jeff Jarrett**.
(04-29-11)

—U.L. Borley

McADAMS—NWA-TWE at the TWE Arena: **Atomic Kid** pinned **Christopher Miller** ... **The Bloodline** (**Nathan Lawler** & **Mark Orton**) defeated **The Fanatics** (**Dynamite Jay Andrews** & **Joey Abel**) ... **Giant Hillbilly** vs. **Uncle Felton** ended in a no-contest ... **Sweet Daddy Jones** pinned **Big Mike Carter** ... **Rick Morgan** beat **Rondel Roosevelt**.
(04-23-11)

—Laura King

SHARON—Deep South Wrestling at Lee's Chapel: **The Atomic Kid** beat U.S. champion **Jason Matthews** for the title ... **Bulldog** defeated **Mike Carter** ... **R.L. Andrews** beat **Matt Harvard** ... **Charles West** defeated **Joey Abel** ... **Angelina** & **Max Maverick** beat **Haley** & **Jon Evans** ... Jason Matthews, Charles West, Jon Evans, Matt Harvard, Haley & Mike Carter defeated Angelina, The Atomic Kid, Bulldog, Max Maverick, Joey Abel, & R. L. Andrews.
(04-16-11)

—Daphne Bowen

MISSOURI

JOPLIN—TNA at Joplin Memorial Hall: **Crimson** defeated **Abyss** ... **Velvet Sky** defeated **Sarita** ... **Scott Steiner** beat **Eric Young** by submission ... World tag team champions **Beer Money Inc.** (**James Storm** & **Robert Roode**) defeated **Brother Devon** & **Tommy Dreamer** ... **AJ Styles** pinned **Bully Ray** ... **Mr. Anderson** pinned **Jeff Jarrett**.
(05-05-11)

—Arnie Silwin

ST. LOUIS—Mid-Missouri Wrestling Alliance at the South Broadway Athletic Club: **Tony Raze** pinned **Stevie K** ... **Jimmy D** defeated **Chase King** ... **Ace Hawkins** beat **David Osborne** ... Junior heavyweight champion **Johnny Courageous** pinned **Jaysin Static** ... **Brandon Espinosa** defeated **LaMarcus Clinton** ... Heavyweight champion **Gary Jackson** beat **The Big Texan** by DQ ... **Max Archer** vs. **Wayne Mitchell** ended in a time-limit draw.
(04-16-11)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

Shiima Xion was smart enough to not get distracted by Shockwave the Robot's weird getup and would round out the field of first-round winners by scoring a pin at the 10:18 mark after a top-rope 450 splash.

Aries is surprised by this neat suplex executed by Cole in the semifinals. Cole scored what many would consider an upset by pinning the former Ring of Honor champ after a scoop-slam in 16:09.

NEVADA

LAS VEGAS—Vendetta Pro Wrestling/ Adrenaline Unleashed at Casino Royale: **Famous B** pinned **Mario Banks** ... **Gunnar Tobias Ulrich** pinned **Kraven** ... **Eric Cross** defeated **Jacob Diez** and **Johnny Saovi** in a three-way ... **Johnny Goodtime** pinned **Jason Cash** ... Adrenaline Women's champion **Nikki the New York Knockout** pinned **Buggy** ... **Billy Blade** & **Sean Casey** beat **Sunami** & **Kadin Anthony** ... **Tommy Misfit** pinned **Vansack Acid** ... **Ty-Tan** pinned **KG Fury** ... **Gangrel the Vampire Warrior** defeated **Shannon Ballard** by DQ ... Shannon Ballard won a Casino Royale battle royal for the heavyweight title.
(04-17-11)

—Joseph Duncan

NEW JERSEY

WOODLAND PARK—IWF at the IWF Centre: **Austin Williams** defeated **Aaron Stride** ... **Donte Arcade** & **Karson Slade** defeated tag team champions **Frank Scoleri** & **Kraig Stagg** for the title ... **Jarrett Foster** defeated **Marc Corino** ... **Danny E** defeated **Kevin Knight** ... American champion **Flex Freeman** beat **Damian Adams** ... **Chachi** defeated **Doctor Hurtz** ... IWF heavyweight champion **Franciz** beat **Chris Steeler**.
(04-23-11)

—Shannon Rose

BELLMAWR—Old Time Wrestling at the Arena: **Brian Johnson** pinned **Bobby Shields** ... **George Zlotnicki** defeated **John Graber**... **Craig Nash** beat **Eddie Hawkins** ... **Hot Chocolate** defeated Bobby Shields, **Hercules Shareef**, & **Leo Mercury** ... **Chris Bohren** vs. **Mark Bradley** ended in a time-limit draw ... Brian Johnson pinned Eddie Hawkins.
(04-23-11)

—Brian Johnson

NEW YORK

SAINT JAMES—NYWC at the Sports Arena: **Kenny Royal**, **DJ Pat**, & **Mikey Whipwreck** defeated **The King And I** (**Alex Reynolds** & **King Mega**) & **Chris Forza** ... **Pat Buck** defeated **Tyler Shields** ... **Stockade** & **Rex Lawless** beat **Tandemonium** (**Odie** & **Matias**) ... **Nickie 6** beat **Violet** ... **Francis Kipland Stevens III** defeated **Kieran** ... **JT Kasin** & **Braydon Knight** beat **Victor Curz** & **Manny Martinez** ... **John Silver** defeated **K-Pu$Ha** ... **Apollyon** & **Dickie Rodz** beat **Syther** & **Tony Burma** ... Heavyweight champion **Tony Nese** vs. **Ryan Rush** ended in a double-countout.
(05-07-11)

—Kenny Lippe

NEWBURGH—Northeast Wrestling at the Newburgh Free Academy High School Gym: **Cedric Alexander** pinned **Jake Manning** ... **Brian Anthony** beat **Caleb Konley** ... **Jeff Starr** pinned **Robbie E.** ... **Eddie Edwards** defeated **Adam Cole** ... **Sabu** beat **Vik Dalishus**, **Ron Zombie**, and **Ryan McBride** in a four-man tables elimination match ... Heavyweight champion **Matt Taven** beat **Hale Collins** ... **Matt Hardy** defeated **Mike Bennett**.
(04-15-11)

—Tim Walker

NORTH CAROLINA

LUMBERTON—Lumberton Ring Wars Carolina at the Lumberton Indoor Flea Market: **Dark Arrival** defeated **The Krazy Killer Klowns** ... **Iron Mike** won a 10-man battle royal ... Iron Mike defeated YouTube champion **Diego Vasquez** for the title ... **Ash Walker** pinned **Hangtyme** ... ***Finals of the Nite-Stic Invitational Tag Team Tournament:*** **Generation Elite** beat **G** & **Cletus Bass**.
(05-07-11)

—Eddie Brown

NEWTON—Pride & Honor Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: **Aaron Vaughn** pinned **Steven Stifler** ... **Tim Thomas** pinned **Bradford Steele** ... **Ostgard** pinned **Alex Avgerinos** ... **Exodus** pinned **Derek Ryze** ... **Steven Walters** pinned **John Skyler** ... **Soda City Bad Boys** (**Jon Malus** & **Brandon Paradise**) defeated **Abel Adams** & **Chrisifix**.
(04-30-11)

—Brett Wolverton

GASTONIA—Southern Heritage Championship Wrestling at the Forestview High School Gym: **George South Sr.** & **Rex Rumble** defeated **John Collins** & **Johnny Smooth** ... **The Sheik Bullard** beat **Mr. Florida** ... **Lorelei Lee** defeated **Traci Brooks** ... Hardcore champion **Lodi** beat **C.W. Anderson** ... **Jeff Lewis** defeated **Reid Flair** to become first SHCW heavyweight champion ... **Nick Dinsmore** & **Buz** defeated **The Powers of Pain** (**Warlord** & **Barbarian**) by DQ ... **Brian James** beat **Trevor Murdoch**.
(04-16-11)

—Michael Carpenter

OHIO

WESTLAKE—Mega Championship Wrestling at the Holiday Inn: **AERO**, **Cameron West**, **Eli McFly**, & **Bobbinette Carey** defeated **The Duke**, **Sodapop Johnson**, **Itchy the Clown**, & **Mickey Vaughn** ... Mickey Vaughn beat Cameron West ... Tag Team champions **The Preferred Players Club** defeated **The Bouncer** & **TJ Dynamite** ... **Jeff Jevic** beat **Aftermath**, **Rickey Shane Page**, Eli McFly, & AERO in a five-way ... **Shawn Blaze** beat heavyweight champion **Mad Dog Manson** for the title ... **Little Richard Davenport** won an anime costume battle royal.
(04-30-11)

—Johnny James

EDON—Championship International Wrestling at Edon High School: **Zack Gowan** defeated **N8 Mattson** ... **Rosey** & **Amish Assassin** defeated **Mark James** & **Rev. Christopher Saint** ... U.S. champion **Dick Foley** defeated **Dave DuPonte** ... **The War Machines** (**Nitro** & **Mauler**) defeated tag team champion **The Thoroughbreds** (**Kris Korvis** & **Aaron Orion**) for the title ... Heavyweight champion **Brian Castle** defeated **Andy Chene** ... **Kevin Thorn** beat **Krimson** in a casket match.
(04-30-11)

—Kaiden & Landen Monahan

BARBERTON—Real Action Wrestling at the Shamrock Nite Club: **Bobbinette Carey** beat **Barry Sagitarious** ... Barry Sagitarious beat Heritage champion **Trystan Tyler** for the title ... **Axel**, **Stevie Edwards**, & **Angeldust** defeated **Marcus Knight**, **Jamie Starr**, & **Angel Camacho** ... **The Bouncer** & **Shawn Blaze** beat Trystan Tyler & **Vinny DiMarzo** ... Heavyweight champion **Aftermath** defeated **Josh Emanuel**.
(04-26-11)

—Johnny James

BARBERTON—Real Action Wrestling at Shamrock Nite Club: **Angeldust** beat **Flea** ... **Barry Sagitarious** & **Bobbinette Carey** beat **Trystan Tyler** & **Vinny DiMarzo** ... **The Bouncer** defeated **Josh Emanuel** ... **Jamie Starr** & **Angel Camacho** defeated **Stevie Edwards** & **Axel** to win the vacant tag team title ... Heavyweight champion **Aftermath** beat **Marcus Knight**.
(04-19-11)

—Johnny James

CINCINNATI—TNA Lockdown at the U.S. Bank Arena: **Max Buck** beat **Jay Lethal**, **Suicide**, **Chris Sabin**, **Robbie E**, **Jeremy Buck**, **Amazing Red**, and **Brian Kendrick** in an Xscape match ... **Ink Inc.** (**Jesse Neal** & **Shannon Moore**) beat **The British Invasion** (**Douglas Williams** & **Magnus**), **Eric Young** & **Orlando Jordan**, and **Scott Steiner** & **Crimson** ... **Mickie James** defeated Knockouts champion **Madison Rayne** for the title in a title-vs.-hair match ... **Samoa Joe** beat **D'Angelo Dinero** by submission ... **Matt Morgan** pinned **Hernandez** ... **Jeff Jarrett** defeated **Kurt Angle** in a cage match ... World champion **Sting** beat **Rob Van Dam** and **Mr. Anderson** in a three-way ... **Kazarian**, **Christopher Daniels**, **James Storm**, & **Robert Roode** defeated **Ric Flair**, **Abyss**, **Matt Hardy**, & **Bully Ray** in a Lethal Lockdown match.
(04-17-11)

—Peter Foster

PENNSYLVANIA

PITTSBURGH—Deaf Wrestlefest 2011 at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf: **Lou Marconi** vs. **Dennis Gregory** ended in a time-limit draw ... **J-Ru** pinned **Johnny Mercury** ... **Seymour Snott** pinned **Jimmy Jack Funk Jr.** ... **Kris Kash** & **Justin Sane** beat **The VIPs** (**Shawn Blanchard** & **Lou Martin**) ... **Dash Bennett** pinned **Trailer Park Heat** ... **Zach Gowen** pinned **Jason Gory** ... **Tony Atlas**, **Dynamite Dean**, & **Shane Douglas** defeated **Sean Alexander**, **Bill Collier**, & **Bobby Shields** ... **Frank Staletto** pinned **Patrick Hayes** ... **Damien Wayne** pinned **Scott Prodigy** ... **Jimi the High-Flying Hippie** pinned **Brittany Force** ... **Jon Burton** pinned **Crusher Hansen** ... **Doink the Clown** pinned **Nick Crane**.
(05-01-11)

—Al Alven

RHODE ISLAND

PROVIDENCE—PWF Northeast at Davey Lopes Rec Center: **Vinny Marseglia** beat **Brendan Michael Thomas** and **Matt Magnum** in a triple-threat ... **Ariel**, **Mistress Belmont**, & **Amber** beat **Alexxis Nevaeh**, **Mercedes**, & **Ivy** ... **Johnny Hayes** pinned **Chris Venom** ... **Kris Pyro** & **Davey Cash** beat **Guy Alexander** & **William King** ... **Jon Poe** pinned **TJ Richter** ... Heavyweight champion **Brandon Locke** beat **Jason Blade** by DQ.
(05-07-11)

—Dave Ratty

WOONSOCKET—Showcase Pro Wrestling at the SPW Arena: **Ryan Waters** & **Matt Magnum** defeated **Monster Mack** & **Trainee #1** ... **Vinny Marseglia** pinned **Keanu** ... **Nicholas Night** defeated **Roger Williams** ... **Triplelicious** pinned **Kevin Karizma** ... **Buddy Romano** beat **The Bum** ... **Scott King** defeated **Mr. Christopher Blackheart** by countout ... **Cargill Vinton** & **Buck Nasty** beat **Barricade** & **Mike Nice**.
(05-06-11)

—Shawn O'Domski

CENTRAL FALLS—Power League Wrestling at Central Falls High School: Tag Team champions **Uncle Ulysses McGraw** & **Nick Steel** defeated **The Prestige** ... **Keanu** beat New England champion **Nick Night** by DQ ... **J.T. Fox** defeated **Vinny Marseglia** and **Zack Static** in a three-way ... **Doink the Clown** defeated **Buddy Romano** ... **Danny Davis** beat **Mr. Wrestling VI** ... **Terrence Butler** defeated **La Calabaza** ... **Taeler Hendrix** defeated **Luscious Latasha** ... Heavyweight champion **Don Vega** beat **Golden Burke** ... **Paul Olson** & **Paul Lauzon** defeated **Carlos Arenas** & **Dr. Heresy**.
(04-17-11)

—Carlos Arenas

SOUTH CAROLINA

GREENVILLE—WWE Raw at the BI-LO Center: **Evan Bourne** defeated **Dolph Ziggler** ... **Mason Ryan** beat **Primo** ... **Jack Swagger** beat **Percy Watson** ... **Chris Masters** beat **Zack Ryder** ... **The Big Show** & **Kofi Kingston** defeated **CM Punk** & **Alberto Del Rio** ... Divas champion **Brie Bella** beat **Eve Torres** ... **Rey Mysterio Jr.** beat **R-Truth** ... WWE champion **John Cena** pinned **The Miz**.
(05-08-11)

—Gary Von Stang

Ciampa did his best to hide the rib injury he suffered against Swann from his semifinal-round opponent Xion. Fortunately for Tommaso, he needed only 7:08 to soften up "The Filipino Flex Factory" and advance by submission with a modified cloverleaf.

CHESNEE—Chesnee Pro Wrestling at the Chesnee Fire Department: **Myric Moore** pinned **Shea Shea McGrady** ... **Joey Rhymer** defeated **Ric Hart** by DQ ... U.S. champion **Nick Fury** pinned **Crunk** ... U.S. champion Nick Fury pinned **Wicked** in a match where the loser had to wear a dress ... **Will Demented** pinned TV champion **Rob Killjoy** for the title ... **Ricky Morton** & **Chris Hamrick** defeated **Thug** & **Kid Chaos**.
(04-29-11)

—Brett Wolverton

COLUMBIA—TLC at The Loose Cockaboose: **Hexxon** pinned **Gluteus Maximus** ... **Brute Force II** (**Pain** & **Punishment**) defeated **Affirmative Action** (**DeAndre Jackson** & **Nick Kismet**) ... **Cali Casanova** pinned **Mickey Richards** ... **John Skyler** & **B.J. Hancock** defeated **Bob Keller** & **Jesse Windham** in a streetfight ... **Billy Brash** pinned **Stoney Hooker** ... **Sixx** pinned **Jay Batista** ... **Dirty** & **T-Roy Jones** defeated **Team Macktion** (**T.J.** & **Kirby Mack**) and the **Soda City Bad Boys** (**Jon Malus** & **Brandon Paradise**) in a TLC match ... **Micah Taylor** pinned **Chris Mayne** ... **Sgt. Solitude** & **Johnny Flex** defeated **Bradford Steele** & **Danny South** ... **Zack Salvation** pinned **Josh Magnum** ... **Caleb Konley** defeated **Jake Manning** and **Cedric Alexander** in a triple-threat ... **Bill DeMott** defeated **Ken Magnum** by countout.
(04-16-11)

—Brett Wolverton

Ciampa was in familiar territory, wrestling in the Super 8 championship round a third straight year. Playing with house money, surprise finalist Cole had little pressure on him to win. Ciampa, wrestling brilliantly (above) was on a mission that only he—and perhaps the Buffalo Bills of 17 years ago—could understand. After winning with a top-rope cradle slam in 12:18, Tommaso admires his prize while Cole acknowledges who was the better man on this day (opposite page).

TENNESSEE

NASHVILLE—WWE Smackdown at the Bridgestone Arena: **Jey Uso** defeated **Trevor Murdoch** ... **Sin Cara** pinned **Daniel Bryan** ... **Cody Rhodes** pinned **Ted DiBiase Jr.** ... **Kane** beat Intercontinental champion **Wade Barrett** by DQ ... **Christian** & **Randy Orton** defeated **Mark Henry** & **Sheamus** ... Christian, **Ezekiel Jackson**, & Randy Orton defeated **Heath Slater**, **Justin Gabriel**, & Wade Barrett.
(05-13-11)

—Harley Rigorski

KNOXVILLE—WWE Raw at the Thompson-Boling Arena: **Evan Bourne** defeated **Trevor Murdoch** ... **Eve Torres** & **Kelly Kelly** beat **Brie** & **Nikki Bella** ... **Kane** vs. **Mason Ryan** ended in a no-contest ... **Dolph Ziggler** pinned **Santino Marella** ... WWE champion **John Cena** beat **Alex Riley** by submission in a non-title match ... U.S. champion **Kofi Kingston** pinned **Jack Swagger** ... **The Miz** beat **Alberto Del Rio** and **Rey Mysterio Jr.** in a triple-threat ... WWE champion **John Cena** beat **The Miz**.
(05-09-11)

—Harley Rigorski

NASHVILLE—PGWA/WXCW at the Stadium Inn: **Misty James** defeated **Mickie Knuckles** ... **Christie Ricci** beat **Nikki Diamond** ... **Jessie Belle Smothers** defeated **Sin-D** ... **Abriella of Amazonia** beat **Amanda Ruffin** ... **Heather Owens** defeated **Miss Rachel** ... **Nemesis** beat PGWA and WXCW Women's champion **Tracy Taylor** for the title.
(04-16-11)

—Lavonda Bell

MILLERSVILLE—Millersville Wrestling at the Millersville Arena: **Anthony Wayne** defeated **Lee Cross** ... **LBK** beat **Anthony Wayne** ... **Ox Harley** defeated **Derek Neal** ... **Hammerjack** beat **Bully Douglas** ... **Mickie Knuckles** defeated **Jessie Belle** ... **David Matthews** beat **Shane Eden** ... **Kevin** & **Cody Weatherby** defeated **The Wildboys**.
(04-15-11)

—Lekisha F. Oliver

TEXAS

WAXAHACHIE—NAWA Big Time Pro Wrestling at the NAWA Arena: **Li Fang** beat **American Ninja** ... **Keith Lee** beat **American Mad Dog** ... Tag team champions **Cowboy Adam** & **Tim Storm** defeated **Russian Crusher** & **Russian Destroyer** in a no-DQ, loser-leaves-town match ... **Max Muscles** defeated Texas champion **Doberman** in a loser-eats-dog-food match for the title.
(05-07-11)

—Rob Moore

SAN ANTONIO—River City Wrestling at the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church: **Numero Tres** & **Steve McEnroe** defeated **The Texas Hitmen** (**Big Dogg** & **Skitzo**) ... **Muerte** & **Ray Rowe** beat **Girard St. Christopher** & **Ann Dromeda** ... **The Gulf Black Belt Jones**, **Hernandez**, & **Mini-Mex** beat **The Coast Connection** (**Ben Galvan**, **Rudy Russo**, & **AJ Summers**) ... **JoJo Bravo** pinned International champion **Yo-Hey** for the title ... **Alissa Flash** & **Darci Drake** defeated tag team champions **San Antonio's Most Unwanted** (**Joey Spector**, **Nemesis**, and **Pink**) in a fan lumberjack strap match for the title.
(05-07-11)

—William L. Hamilton

PT. NECHES—Gulf Coast Power Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: Cruiserweight champion **Avarice** beat **Hector Montoya** ... **Jen Alise** pinned **Claudia Solis** ... Tag team champions **The Rough Riders** defeated **Fame** & **Fortune** ... **J Wayne** beat **The Grappler** ... **Irish Mike** pinned **Jasper Davis** ... Heavyweight champion **Max Muscles** defeated **Scott Zenzen**.
(04-30-11)

—J.A. Allen

ATHENS—Wrecking Ball Wrestling at the Lakeview Lodge: **Mike Andrews** pinned **Lil Tony** ... **Dr. Knuckles** beat **Jason X** ... **Billy Club** pinned **Rudy Boy Gonzales** ... **Penguino** defeated **Syar the Magician** ... **Rique Jackson** beat **Barrett Brown**, **Robert Sanders**, and **Jerome Daniels** in a four-way ... Texas champion **Byron Wilcott** defeated **Adam Action** ... Heavyweight champion **Cody Knight** defeated **Jacob Kilgore**.
(04-17-11)

—William Martin

GLADEWATER—Texas Elite Wrestling at East Texas Gusher Days: **Anthony Kraze** & **Bizzy B** defeated **Los Astros** ... Elite champion **Joey Corman** beat **Chris Preston** ... **Court Caution** defeated **Mongoose** by DQ ... **Cory Summers**, **Colton Shane**, & **Sean Cordova** defeated **Archangel**, **Jack Stevens**, & **Jason Skyy** ... **Maxx Lavaro** beat **Hunter Dude Preston**.
(04-16-11)

—Patrick Wallace

HOUSTON—Texas All-Star Wrestling at the Kingdom Arena: **Bubba Lee Travis** pinned **Jessie K Logan** ... **Claudia Solis** beat **Johnny Fantasy** ... **Gustavo Mendoza** beat **Scoby Gober** ... **The Mysterious Q** defeated cruiserweight champion **Amien Rios** in a non-title match ... Heavyweight champion **Dylan Starr** beat **Ryan Davidson**.
(04-16-11)

—J.A. Allen

HOUSTON—Pro Wrestling Alliance at the Clear Lake Sports Center: **Neiko** defeated **Brett Idol** by submission ... **Joey Jersey** & **Mr. Fitness** defeated **Robbie Gilmore** & **Kid Ransom** ... **Ryan Davidson** defeated **Bulkster** ... **Cedric Pain** beat **Wallace Gordon** ... **Amien Rios** pinned **Ruddy Russo** ... **Gabe Hollier** pinned **Kelly Kevin**.
(04-11-11)

—Kevin Bernhardt

WEST VIRGINIA

KEYSER—Elite Pro Wrestling Alliance at the National Guard Armory: **Griffen** beat **Sinister Cross** in a loser- leaves-EPWA match ... **Scott Titus** beat **Bodie Williams** by countout ... **The Patriot** pinned **Gangrel** ... Heavyweight champion **Vince Vega** defeated **Sasian Kwon** ... **Flex Fenom** & **OGB** beat **Michael Austin** & **Leslie Leatherman** ... Cruiserweight champion **Sonjay Dutt** vs. **Robbie Paige** ended in a time-limit draw.
(04-29-11)

—Tim Walker

INTERNATIONAL

CANADA

TORONTO, ON—Ring of Honor at the Ted Reeve Arena: **Claudio Castagnoli** beat **Kyle O'Reilly** ... **Mike Bennett** beat **Steve Corino** ... **Michael Elgin** defeated **Rhett Titus**, **Tommaso Ciampa**, **Adam Cole**, **Grizzly Redwood**, and **Andy Ridge** in a Double Danger Scramble Match, scoring pinfalls over Cole and Redwood ... **Davey Richards** beat **Kenny King** ... **Colt Cabana** defeated **Delirious** ... **El Generico** defeated TV champion **Christopher Daniels** in a non-title match ... Tag Team champions **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** defeated **Jay** & **Mark Briscoe** ... Heavyweight champion **Eddie Edwards** defeated **Chris Hero**.
(05-07-11)

—Nikki Rogers

BROOKLIN, ON—Extreme Wrestling League at the Brooklin Community Center: **Steve Brown** pinned **Joey Valentyne** ... **Alessandro Del Bruno** defeated **Buck 10** and **Eddie Osborne** in a triangle match ... **Johnny Wave** vs. **Justin Sane** ended in a time-limit draw ... **Sabrina Kyle** vs. **Portia Perez** ended in a double-victory, with both sharing the SuperLadies championship ... **Johnny Wave** defeated **Moondog Buddy** and **Mr. Saki** in a triangle match ... **Jessy Jones**, **Stout**, & **Lager** beat **Ethan Page** in a handicap match.
(04-30-11)

—Jeff Smith

FRANCE

LYON—WWE Smackdown at Tony Garnier Hall: **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** pinned **Tyler Reks** ... **Jack Swagger** beat **JTG** by submission... **Cody Rhodes** vs. **Trent Baretta** ended in a no-contest ... **Kofi Kingston** pinned **Drew McIntyre** ... **Beth Phoenix** pinned **Layla** ... WWE tag team champions **Kane** & **Big Show** defeated **Justin Gabriel** & **Heath Slater** ... Intercontinental champion **Wade Barrett** pinned **Chris Masters** ... **Christian** & **Rey Mysterio Jr.** beat **Alberto Del Rio** & **Brodus Clay**.
(04-24-11)

—Simon Barbeau

LYON—WWE Smackdown at Tony Garnier Hall: **Kofi Kingston** won an 11-man battle royal ... **Trent Baretta** pinned **Tyler Reks** ... **Beth Phoenix** & **Kelly Kelly** defeated **Layla** & **Rosa Mendes** ... **Jack Swagger** beat **Chris Masters** by submission ... WWE tag team champions **Kane** & **Big Show** defeated **Justin Gabriel** & **Heath Slater** ... Intercontinental champion **Wade Barrett** pinned Kofi Kingston ... **Rey Mysterio Jr.** pinned **Cody Rhodes** ... **Christian** pinned **Alberto Del Rio** in a streetfight.
(04-23-11)

—Simon Barbeau

STRASBOURG—WWE Smackdown at the Zenith Arena: **Kofi Kingston** won an 11-man battle royal, last eliminating **Jack Swagger** ... **Beth Phoenix** & **Kelly Kelly** defeated **Layla** & **Rosa Mendes** ... Jack Swagger beat **Chris Masters** by submission ... WWE tag team champions **Kane** & **Big Show** defeated **Justin Gabriel** & **Heath Slater** ... Intercontinental champion **Wade Barrett** pinned Kofi Kingston ... **Rey Mysterio Jr.** pinned **Cody Rhodes** ... **Christian** pinned **Alberto Del Rio** in a streetfight.
(04-21-11)

—Simon Barbeau

MEXICO

MEXICO CITY—WWE Raw at Palacio de los Deportes: **Chris Masters** beat **Jack Swagger** by submission ... **Percy Watson** pinned **Zack Ryder** ... **R-Truth** beat **Evan Bourne** ... **Big Show** & **Kofi Kingston** defeated **CM Punk** & **Alberto Del Rio** ... Divas champion **Brie Bella** beat **Eve Torres** ... **Sin Cara** defeated **Dolph Ziggler** ... WWE champion **John Cena** pinned **The Miz**.
(05-13-11)

—Miguel Soto

GUADALAJARA—WWE Raw at Arena V.F.G.: **Chris Masters** beat **Jack Swagger** by submission ... **Percy Watson** pinned **Zack Ryder** ... **Evan Bourne** beat **R-Truth** by DQ ... **Mason Ryan** beat **Primo** ... **Big Show** & **Kofi Kingston** defeated **CM Punk** & **Alberto Del Rio** ... Divas champion **Brie Bella** beat **Eve Torres** ... WWE champion **John Cena** pinned **The Miz**.
(05-12-11)

—Miguel Soto

HERMOSILLO—WWE Raw at Centro de Usos Múltiples: **Chris Masters** beat **Jack Swagger** by submission ... **Percy Watson** pinned **Zack Ryder** ... **R-Truth** beat **Evan Bourne** ... **Mason Ryan** defeated **Primo** ... **Big Show** & **Kofi Kingston** defeated **CM Punk** & **Alberto Del Rio** ... Divas champion **Brie Bella** beat **Eve Torres** ... **Sin Cara** defeated **Dolph Ziggler** ... WWE champion **John Cena** pinned **The Miz**.
(05-11-11)

—Miguel Soto

PWI CLASSIC

FROM THE ISSUE..AUGUST 1981 *INSIDE WRESTLING*

FUNK VS. LAWLER:
WHY THE FANS WERE BARRED FROM THIS MATCH

More than three decades ago, Terry Funk demanded that Jerry "The King" Lawler face him in an empty-arena "I Quit" match. To settle their differences, it may be time for Lawler to make the same demand of WWE announcer Michael Cole

NO ONE EVER intended for it to go so far. No one ever thought someone would get hurt. No one could imagine that the match could get out of hand and turn into what it did.

A tragedy.

All the seats were empty. Every single one of them. All 11,300 seats in the Mid-South Coliseum in Memphis were barren. There were few people in the arena: *Inside Wrestling's* Editor-in-Chief Peter King and Managing Editor Bill Apter, photographer Robert Reed, a TV crew, and announcer Lance Russell.

Oh, yes, and Jerry Lawler and Terry Funk.

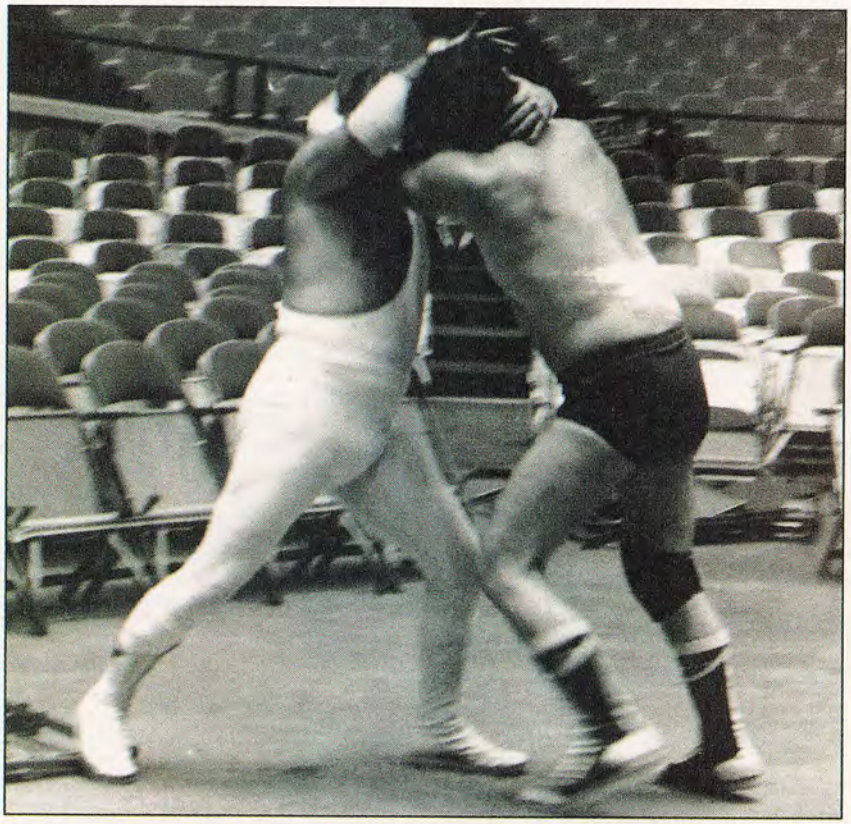
"That Lawler gets the special treatment and I'm sick of it, hear?" raged Terry Funk. "He gets the special favoritism from the fans, from the cops, from the refs and he knows he can't hardly wrestle a whit unless he's getting' someone to help him.

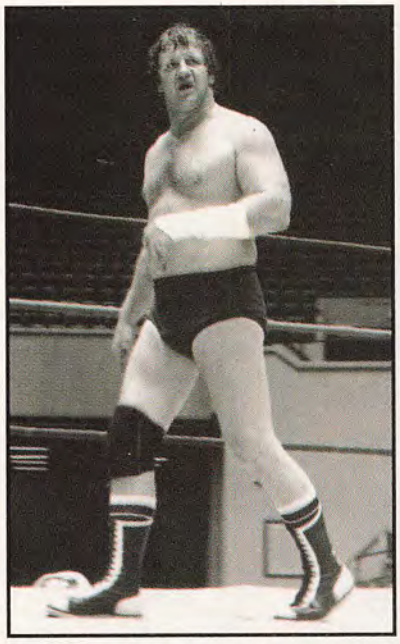
"Well, I'm sick and tired of that weak-kneed, egg-suckin' dog getting away and getting to matches because he's paid everyone off. I want him all alone. I want him just for me where there ain't gonna be any refs or any of his lame fans to help him out. I want him all alone."

Lawler's reply?

"My pleasure."

What these two broad, angry men involved themselves in has made wrestling history. It was an "I Quit" match. No refs, no fans, no nothing. The entire arena, in and out of the ring, was their battleground. Announcer Russell, on occasion, would rush over and thrust a mike near them, asking if they





The animosity between Terry Funk (above left) and Jerry Lawler (above right) was so pitched that Funk wanted to fight Lawler in an empty arena where referees, fans, wrestlers, and the police couldn't break up the battle.

wanted to quit. From the obsession of Terry Funk to the pride of Jerry Lawler, it was obvious neither man would quit until he could no longer move.

They battered each other from one end of the arena to the next. Every time Russell thrust a mike in Funk's face, the former NWA champion spit into it and pushed it away. The same for Lawler. They wouldn't stop, even when they were on the edge of unconsciousness. Maybe they should have. Maybe it was weariness and gut-wrenching hate that spawned the tragedy. No one will ever know. All we know is how it happened.

Funk seized a long, jagged piece of wood from the ring step and charged Lawler. The King of Memphis forced tired legs forward and kicked Funk's arm.

"I just wanted to knock it away," said Lawler afterward.

Instead of the wood flying away harmlessly, a piece dashed upward and flew into Funk's left eye.

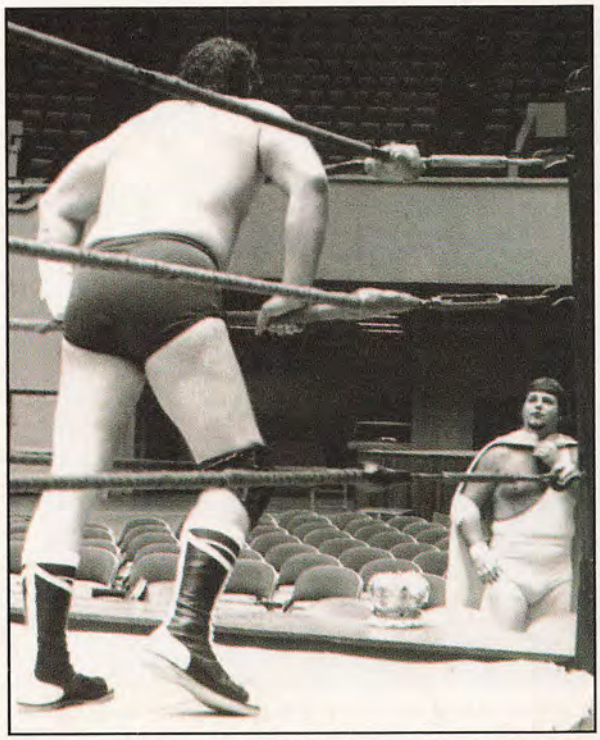
"I couldn't believe it did that," said Lawler.

Bloodied, Funk nearly collapsed. Immediately, doctors were called and Funk was rushed by ambulance to the hospital, where he spent the night under observation.

"We can only say we will try to save the eye," said a harried Dr. William Fulton from the hospital in downtown Memphis.

Lawler, stunned by what happened, tried to follow Funk to the hospital and apologize, but Terry wanted no part of him.

"Keep 'im away from me lest I kill



While Funk could hardly contain himself long enough to let Lawler enter the ring (above left), it was "The King" who enjoyed an early advantage (above right).

INSIDE WRESTLING RATINGS

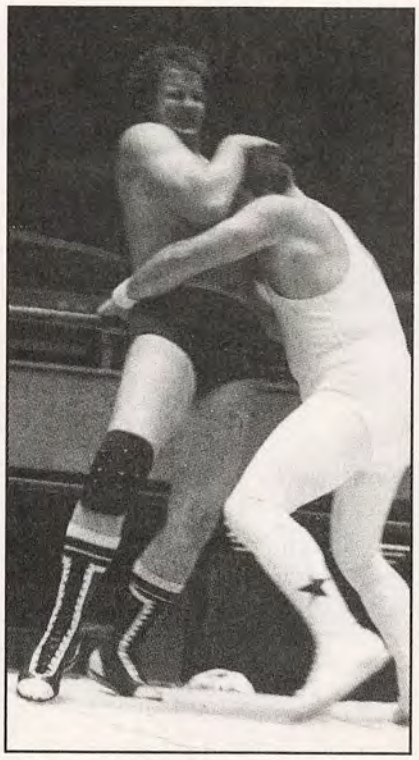
AUGUST 1981

WWF
1—Bob Backlund
2—King Kong Mosca
3—Magnificent Muraco
4—Stan Hansen
5—Pedro Morales
6—Sgt. Slaughter
7—Pat Patterson
8—George Steele
9—Killer Khan
10—Rick Martel

AWA
1—Nick Bockwinkel
2—Crusher Blackwell
3—John Studd
4—Baron Von Raschke
5—Crusher
6—Dino Bravo
7—Tito Santana
8—Jim Brunzell
9—Greg Gagne
10—Jerry Lawler

NWA
1—Harley Race
2—Roddy Piper
3—Tommy Rich
4—Ted DiBiase
5—Ivan Koloff
6—Dusty Rhodes
7—Jim Garvin
8—Sgt. Jacques Goulet
9—Ric Flair
10—Terry Funk

TAG TEAMS
1—Ole & Gene Anderson
2—The Moondogs
3—Jesse Ventura & Adrian Adonis
4—The Fabulous Freebirds
5—The Assassins
6—Dick Murdoch & Junkyard Dog
7—Kevin & David Von Erich
8—Mr. Fuji & Tenryu
9—The Samoans
10—Massa Fuchi & Mr. Onieta



The hated rivals mix it up along the ropes (above). Funk, hurling a pair of chairs (right), would later suffer a severe eye injury when his plan to use foreign objects in the match backfired.

Each man took turns battering the other outside the ring as Funk sends Lawler headfirst into the ring apron (inset) and Lawler kicks Funk into some ringside seats. Clearly, Funk and Lawler were more interested in punishing than pinning each other.

'im," yelled Funk in the ambulance.

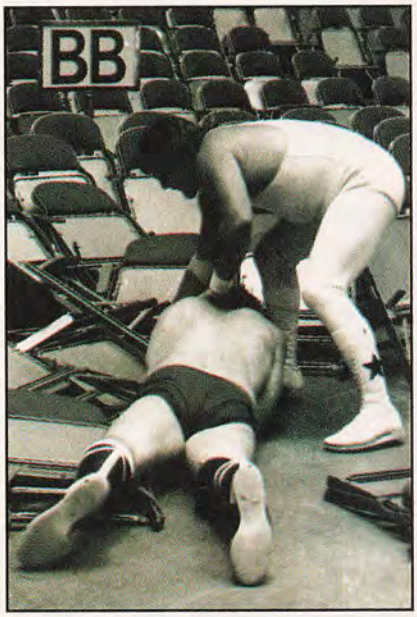
Until further tests are conducted, no one knows whether surgery will be performed to save Funk's eye. Permanent damage to the retina is feared. And Lawler feels terrible.

"God, I don't know. I didn't mean to hurt him like that," said Lawler. "I never meant for this to happen. Hell, I'd be a liar to say I didn't want to give him a good thrashing, but permanent damage, losing his eye, man, man I didn't want that. I'm so sorry, I really am. I'm prepared to do anything to help him, anything at all."

Funk told Lawler when he called exactly how he could best help him.

"He told me to drop dead," said Lawler, tears welling in his eyes. "Doesn't he know I never wanted this to happen? He doesn't believe me, heck, I don't want this to happen to anyone."

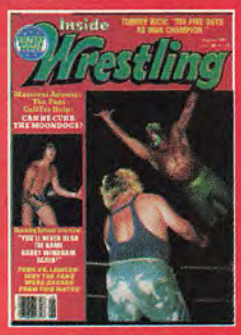
And so one man mourns while another lies in a hospital bed staring darkly through bandages, wondering if light will ever pierce that left eye again. □



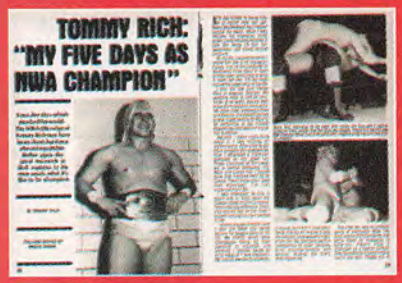
In the end, this match was stopped by paramedics after Funk was temporarily blinded by a piece of wood that lodged in his eye. Lawler came away from the match unhappy with the outcome and Funk would go on resenting him.

///// *INSIDE WRESTLING*, AUGUST 1981

On the Cover: Who knew what went on in the warped minds of The Moondogs, Rex and King? Capt. Lou Albano thought he knew. So did Mil Mascaras, who took it upon himself to wrestle King at Madison Square Garden in hopes of saving the WWF from The Moondogs' violence ... and saving The Moondogs from Albano.



Don't Blink. In the record books, Tommy Rich's NWA World title reign lasted little longer than a hiccup. But to "Wildfire," they were the most unforgettable five days of his career. Even Rich himself had trouble describing what it felt like to be champion for those fleeting few days.



Take Two. After dropping the Mid-Atlantic heavyweight title to Ivan Koloff, Rick Steamboat faced the grueling prospect of battling the likes of Harley Race, Greg Valentine, Ernie Ladd, and Jimmy Snuka all over again. Though he had the support of the fans, Steamboat knew the road back to title contention would be hard and lonely.

What's In A Name? For Black Jack Mulligan Jr., quite a bit. Proud of the tag team matches he and his famous father were turning in throughout the Tennessee and Georgia territories, Mulligan Jr. vowed in "Hotseat" to never use the name Barry Windham again.

Jaw To Jaw. Harley Race was a man of few words. With his track record of success, he didn't need to exchange words with anybody. Only a jabber-jaw like Roddy Piper could goad the taciturn Race into a war of words, which is exactly what he did when these two rulebreakers squared off in "One On One."

BETWEEN FALLS

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED welcomes readers' comments on any of our stories or columns.

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CENA-ROCK

Who else but The Rock could cause a stir so electrifying that Vince McMahon is forced to reveal WrestleMania's main event a year in advance?

Of course, it takes two to tango, and John Cena certainly did his part in bringing his conflict with The Rock to a head. As expected, reaction to the cover of our August 2011 issue was mixed.

"John Cena and The Rock are on two different planes," wrote Mark Brown. "Cena shouldn't even be in the same ring as 'The Great One.' I can't wait until WrestleMania 28, so I can see The Rock beat Cena down."

"The Rock is funny and all that, but he hasn't wrestled in seven years," wrote Jana Salimann. "Cena is sharper and younger than The Rock, and will teach him a lesson at 'Mania."

Reader Bill Pulschte is backing neither The Rock nor Cena. "The Rock and Cena bore me," he wrote. "I want to see a real wrestler like Daniel Bryan in action at WrestleMania 28."

A FITTING FINISH

Dan Murphy's article "Edge Of Insanity! 'The Rated R Superstar's' Mad Rush To Secure His Legacy" (June 2011) had proven prophetic. Maybe Edge knew for a long time that the end was sooner than we all thought.

It seems only fitting that his final match was a successful World title defense against Alberto Del Rio at WrestleMania 27. After a career like his, Edge deserved to go out on top.

SEAN ROONEY
Carlisle, PA

WHERE'S BETH?

Maybe I'm paranoid, but I just can't understand why Beth Phoenix has been relegated to *WWE Superstars*. For years, Phoenix was the measuring stick by which female wrestlers were judged in WWE. She's the total package of strength, skill, and beauty, yet rarely appears on *Smackdown* or *Raw* anymore. I hope wrestling on *Superstars* doesn't mean she'll soon be "future endeavored."

RYAN TERLACHER
Los Angeles, CA

Despite womanhandling Lay-Cool easily after returning from a knee injury, Beth Phoenix has appeared sporadically on WWE TV. Reader Ryan Terlacher fears that Phoenix's recent appearance on *WWE Superstars* could be a sign of bad things to come for "The Glamazon."

Photo by George Napolitano

AJ Styles' recent return to TNA to battle Bully Ray has reader Heath Neely excited. However, Heath is really eager to see AJ face Sting for the TNA World championship.

SHORT AND SWEET

Nothing made me happier than watching The Miz lose at Extreme Rules.

ZANE SCHILL
Pittsburgh, PA

NO WORTHY CHAMPS

Sting deserves props for an excellent career, but I think he's totally overrated as a champion. People get very excited about his matches, but to me, they are only so-so. In fact, I think Sting's reign is emblematic of a bigger overall problem in wrestling today. The champions really do nothing to separate themselves from the pack. There is nothing special about them or their reigns.

Aside from the fact that he always cheated to defend his title, I challenge anyone to tell me what was so special about The Miz? I wish somebody out there, whether it's in WWE, TNA, or somewhere else, would step up and put together a championship reign we'll all remember 10 years from now.

ARMAND D'AGOSTINO
Baltimore, MD

SWAGGER SIDETRACKED

I'm hoping that Jack Swagger's shift back to Raw after the WWE draft lights a fire under his butt. He needs to stop fooling around with Michael Cole and get back to worrying about his own career. Swagger is too good a wrestler to be Cole's sidekick. He's a former World champion, for crying out loud. Hanging around Cole will only keep him sidetracked from accomplishing what he's capable of.

BILLY PORTER
Chicago, IL

HAPPY RETURNS

I'm so happy AJ Styles has finally returned to TNA. Something about TNA just feels flat when AJ's not around. Hopefully, he can stay healthy enough to make another run at the TNA World title, which would be a very interesting development considering the history AJ has with current champion Sting.

HEATH NEELY
Toronto, ON

COLT CRAZY

I had just about heard the news that Colt Cabana defeated Adam Pearce to win the NWA heavyweight championship when I got word that he lost it to The Sheik just a few weeks later. Was Cabana trying to beat Tommy Rich's record for shortest NWA championship reign or something?

Colt is my favorite wrestler, whether he's competing in NWA, Ring of Honor, or any other independent organization. I would like to tell him to pick himself up, get back on the horse, and give The Sheik hell when he gets a rematch. I also want him to know that all his fans are behind him, and we love him with or without the NWA championship belt around his waist.

SYLVIA HOFFMAN
Maywood, IL □

BACK ISSUES OF the Wrestler

When we recently moved to a new warehouse facility, we uncovered many back issues of THE WRESTLER that haven't been available to the public for years! Supplies are limited, so order today!

Dec. 1979: Is Andre Ready To Quit Wrestling? Also: Harley Race-El Halcon, Superstar Graham, Steve Keirn, Volkoff-Bruno, Sheik-Mascaras, Igor-Lewin, Dusty Rhodes, Putski-Brower.
Aug. 1981: Ted DiBiase: "Now I Know I Can Defeat Harley Race." Also: Mr. Wrestling II-Assassins, Dusty Rhodes, Sgt. Slaughter, Austin Idol, Blackwell-Gagne, Valentine-Bravo, Rick Martel, Bobby Eaton.
April 1982: How Jack Brisco Controls Ric Flair's Championship Destiny. Also: Pedro Morales, Eric Embry, Tito Santana, Valentine-Atlas, Roop-DiBiase, Armstrongs, John Studd.
July 1982: Harley Race—His Destiny Is In The Hands Of Tommy Rich. Also: Rick Steamboat, Chief Jay Strongbow, Buzz Sawyer, Ric Flair, Roddy Piper.
Aug. 1982: Nick Bockwinkel: "Tommy Rich Is Too Stupid To Be Champion!" Also: Putski-Adonis, Blackjack Mulligan Jr., Roddy Piper, Rick Steamboat, Lawler-Kaufman, Mike Graham.
Nov. 1982: Clash Of The Titans—Backlund vs. Flair: Who's Better? Also: Putski & Snuka, Roddy Piper, Brian Blair, Chick Donovan, scaffold matches.

May 1983: What Will Happen When The Samoans Become Too Smart For Capt. Lou Albano? Also: Tommy Rich, Terry Allen, Eddie Gilbert, Kerry-Race, Ladd & Rhodes, Flair-Orndorff.
July 1983: Ric Flair: "I Wrestle The Men Backlund Is Afraid Of." Also: Putski-Adonis, Kevin Sullivan, Bob Roop, Martel-Heenan.
Oct. 1983: Record-Breaking Seventh Title Reign: Harley Race Defeats Ric Flair For The NWA Title. Also: Ron Bass, Mr. Olympia-Mr. Wrestling II, Sawyer-Murdoch, Ann Gunkel, Briscos, Dillon-Mosca, Frank Tunney.
Dec. 1983: The Night The AWA World Title Was Stolen From Mil Mascaras. Also: Roddy Piper, Larry Zbyszko, Dino Bravo, Fabulous Ones, Garvin & Sunshine.
March 1984: Is Tito Santana Trying To Blackmail The WWF? Also: Wayne & Sawyer, Hogan-Race, David Von Erich, Jesse Ventura.
May 1985: The Road Warriors vs. Dusty Rhodes & Manny Fernandez: Exclusive Coverage Of The Historic Tag Team Superbowl! Also: Al-Kaissie-Gagne, Backlund-Race, Haynes-Kamala, Tito Santana.
July 1985: It's A Dog's Life ... And Junkyard Dog Wouldn't Trade It With Anyone! Also: Backlund-Martel, Kernodle-Koloff, Butch Reed, Hernandez & Sunshine, Mike Graham.
Oct. 1985: David Shultz Gets An NWA Title Shot: Ric Flair—"I Wrestle The Men Hulk Hogan Is Afraid Of!" Also: Misty Blue, Rick Martel, Kendall Windham, George Steele, Killer Brooks, all-time top 10.
July 1986: How King Kong Bundy Became The WWF's Most Hated Man. Also: Lex Luger, Nikita Koloff-Billy Graham, The Fabulous Ones, Ric Flair, Rick Martel.
Jan. 1987: Bobby Heenan's Bitter Crusade To Destroy Hulk Hogan. Also: Borne & Sawyer, Garvins, Ted DiBiase, Misty Blue Simmes.
Feb. 1987: Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever. Also: Roberts-Steamboat, Crusher Yurkof, Terry Gordy, Wendell Cooley.
March 1987: Ivan & Khrushchev's Kremlin Orders: Crush Nikita Koloff's Russian Revolution! Also: Barry Windham, One Man Gang, Brian Adias, Savage-Steamboat, Jimmy Snuka.
Dec. 1987: Hulk Hogan: Will He Be Drowned By The New Wave Of Challengers? Also: Hennig-Lawler, Windham-Steiner, Flair-Williams, Brutus Beefcake, Ronnie Garvin.
Jan. 1988: The Experts Agree: The Road Warriors Will Turn Bad In 1988! Also: Koloff-Taylor, Curt Hennig, Duggan-DiBiase.
May 1988: Belt Or No Belt ... Hulk Hogan Is Still The People's Champion! Also: Owen Hart, Tatum & Victory, Scott Hall, Madusa Miceli, Luger-Arn.
June 1988: How Sting's War With Ric Flair Could Make Him A Horseman! Also: Bobby Heenan, Martel-Zenk, Kerry-Gordy, Ted DiBiase, Nikita Koloff.
Aug. 1988: World Tag Title Power Shift! Also: Windham & Luger, Demolition, Taylor-Freebirds, Paul Ellering, Owen & Bret.
March 1989: Scared Stiff! "Don't Say Snake!" Also: Jeff Jarrett, Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow, Hercules, Iron Sheik.
May 1989: Rick Steamboat—Champion; Rick Steamboat—Challenger: Which Is Better? Also: Sid Vicious, Dusty Rhodes, Savage-Hogan, Samoan Swat Team, Wendi Richter.
June 1989: Ultimate Warrior's Mission Impossible: Destroy Randy Savage For Hulk Hogan. Also: Rick Steamboat, Rick Martel, Larry Zbyszko, Luger-Windham by Sting, Ric Flair.
July 1989: Dino Bravo: The Man Hulk Hogan Cannot Beat! Also: Flair-Steamboat, Rhodes & Perez, Road Warriors & Ellering, Michael Hayes.
Dec. 1989: Gary Hart: "Muta Took The Sting Out Of Sting!" Also: Ken Patera, Larry Zbyszko, Skyscrapers, Andre & Ultimate Warrior, Barry Windham, Rock 'n' Roll Express.
Jan. 1990: The Hulk Hogan Book Of Lists. Also: Brian Pillman, Rich-Luger, Tully & Arn, P.Y. Chu-Hi, Greg Gagne.
April 1990: Hulk Hogan: A Decade Of Greatness. Also: Luger-Flair, Woman, Piper-Heenan, Billy Travis, Badd Company.
July 1990: My 10 Challenges To Ric Flair, By Lex Luger. Also: Lanny Poffo, Dusty-Savage, Luger-Flair, Doom, Tully Blanchard.
Sept. 1990: The Ultimate Warrior Wimps Out! Why He Won't Wrestle Hulk Hogan. Also: Billy Jack Haynes, Lex Luger, Doom-Steiners, Tugboat, Kerry-Borne.
Oct. 1990: Hulk Hogan vs. Earthquake: Exclusive SummerSlam Preview & Analysis. Also: Ultimate Warrior, Ric Flair, Tommy Rich, Tasmanian Devil, Chris Von Erich.
Dec. 1990 (Special Issue): SummerSlam! Exclusive Full-Color Coverage! Also: Stan Hansen, Arn Anderson, Ultimate Warrior, Vic Steamboat, Scott Putski.
Feb. 1991: The Incredible "Halloween Havoc Hoax"! Unraveling The Diabolical Plot. Also: Muta-Steamboat, Hogan-Hart, Ultimate Warrior, Cornette & Express, Norman.
March 1991: Warning To The Ultimate Warrior: Roddy Piper Wants You! Also: Gilbert-Jarrett, Cornette & Express, Teddy Long, Survivor Series, Scott Norton.
April 1991: Hulk Hogan: The Challenges That Remain. Also: Ted DiBiase, Skyscrapers, Lex Luger, Tom Zenk, Fabulous Ones.
May 1991: Only Hulk Hogan Can Rid The WWF Of The Stench Of Sgt. Slaughter. Also: Ric Flair, Bobby Eaton, Sheik-Brazil, Power & Glory, Terry Funk.
June 1991: How Much Longer Can We Depend On Hulk Hogan? Also: Nasty Boys, Sting, Flair-Gigante, Cactus Jack, Kevin Von Erich.
July 1991: Can Ric Flair Shatter The "Myth" Of Japanese Superiority? Also: Embry & Prichard, LOD-Nastys, Steiners, Savage & Elizabeth.
Aug. 1991: If Sgt. Slaughter Said "I'm Sorry" ... Would Hulk And The World Forgive Him? Also: Luger-Nikita, Hennig-Davey Boy, Lanny Poffo, Bam Bam Bigelow.
Nov. 1991: Lex Luger Wins The Title—But Loses His Fans. Also: Rick Steamboat, Roddy Piper, Global, Diamond Studd, Lawler-Embry.
Jan. 1992: The LOD's Championship Catastrophe: Overpowered By The Natural Disasters. Also: Johnny B. Badd, Mr. Hughes, Jake Roberts, Ronnie Gossett.
Feb. 1992: Shocking WWF Report: McMahon Offers Bounty On Flair—Will Vince Pay The Piper? Also: Ron Simmons, Tito Santana, Bob Backlund, R. Steiner-Abdullah.
March 1992: After Survivor Series & Tuesday In Texas: Has The WWF Title Suffered Irreparable Damage? Also: Brian Pillman, Anderson & Bruiser, Rude-Sting, Mountie-Hart, Jeff Jarrett.
April 1992: After A Year Of Tragedy & Turmoil: The Magic Is Back In WCW! Also: Chris Candido, Paul Orndorff, Lady X, Paul Bearer, Hennig & Flair, Michaels & Jannetty.
July 1992: "Number Two Just Won't Do" For Rick Rude, The U.S. Belt Means Failure. Also: Greg Valentine, Madusa, Gorilla Monsoon, Legion of Doom, Nurse Vanessa.
Aug. 1992: The Ultimate Warrior: WrestleMania's Accidental Hero. Also: Bunkhouse matches, Undertaker-Roberts, Sting, JYD, Rob Van Dam.
Sept. 1992: Hey, Legion Of Doom—Go For The Title Or Go Away! Also: Repo-Crush, Mondo Kleen, Freebirds-Valentine & Taylor, Dangerous Alliance, Moondogs.
Nov. 1992: WWF Beware! It's The Perfect Time For A Curt Hennig Comeback! Also: Crush, Butch Reed, Sting, Buddy Rogers, Dan Spivey.
Nov. 1992: WWF Beware! It's The Perfect Time For A Curt Hennig Comeback! Also: Crush, Butch Reed, Sting, Buddy Rogers, Dan Spivey.
Dec. 1992: He's *Baaaaaack!* Jake Roberts Slithers Into WCW. Also: Paul E. Dangerously, Ron Simmons, Hulk Hogan, Michaels-Martel, Gilberts-Rock 'n' Rolls.
Jan. 1993: Sting Turns Sadistic: "Hurting Jake Makes Me Happy!" Also: Anderson & Eaton, Bushwhackers-Moondogs, Ramon-Savage, Natural Disasters, Masa Chono.
Feb. 1993: WWF Champion Bret Hart: His Five Most Dangerous Challenges. Also: Sgt. Slaughter, Steve Austin, Rick Steiner, Bob Backlund, Terry Taylor.
March 1993 (Special Issue): 1992—The Year In Pictures. Also: Madusa-Paul E., Curt Hennig, Davey Boy Smith, Jesse Ventura, Predictions For '93.
April 1993 What's In? What's Out? Also: Razor Ramon, Rick Steamboat, Patriot, Tatanka, Brian Christopher.
May 1993: Sumo Sadism: Will Yokozuna Make His Biggest Splash At WrestleMania? Also: Jim Cornette, Christopher-Jarrett, Benoit-Scorpio, Windham & Rhodes, Hennig-Luger.
Nov. 1993: Bret Hart vs. Lex Luger: It's Not Over Yet! Also: Rude-Dustin, Hulk Hogan, Marty Jannetty, Heavenly Bodies, Tatanka, Sherri Martel.
May 1994: Aftershocks! How The Royal Rumble Shook Up WrestleMania. Also: Hulk Hogan, Boss, Douglas-Sherri, Patriot, improve WCW.
July 1994: Ric Flair vs. Hulk Hogan: We Preview The Inevitable Battle. Also: Dreamer-Snuka, Jim Crockett's WWN, Ted DiBiase, Shane Douglas, Terra Ryzing.
Aug. 1994: Bret's Nightmare Team Becomes A Reality: Owen Hart & Yokozuna. Also: Cactus-Vader, MOM, Flair-Badd, Nasty Boys, Luna Vachon.
Sept. 1994 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report! Also: Big Van Vader, Parker-Hollywood Blonds, Sting-Rude, WWF legal problems, Prince Kharis, Bunkhouse-Rhodes, Public Enemy.
Nov. 1994: Hulk Hogan's New Commandments: Say Prayers, Take Vitamins ... And Kick Butt! Also: Owen-Bret, Lord Steven Regal, Johnny B. Badd, Jerry Lawler, Mikey Whipwreck.

Jan. 1995: Our Holiday Wish List For 1995. Also: Johnny B. Badd, DiBiase-Tatanka, Bob Backlund, PG-13, Hacksaw Duggan.
Feb. 1995: Hulk's A Maniac! Why Vader Should Be Deathly Afraid Of Hogan. Also: Honky Tonk Man, Sabu-Dangerously, Skaaland-Luger, Steiners, Patriot-Bagwell, Undertaker-Vicious.
April 1995: Imagine Wrestling Today If ... Also: Gunn & Smothers, Harlem Heat, Money Inc., Lawler-Cornette.
June 1995 (Special Issue): He's Barking ... And He's Ready To Bite: The British Bulldog Demands A Title Shot—Now! Also: Avalanche, Bubba Rogers, The Kid, Alex Wright, Rottens.
July 1995: Hulk Hogan's Contract With America. Also: Marty Jannetty, Brian Pillman, Lawrence Taylor, Bill Dundee.
Oct. 1995: President Backlund?! Also: Steiners, Austin & Pillman, Miss Texas, Gordon Solie.
Nov. 1995: "Take That—And Shut Up!" If Savage Can't Silence Flair, He's Through! Also: Mabel, Jarrett-Ramon, Renegade, WWF legends roundtable.
Winter 1995: Exclusive Preview: Sting vs. Hogan: This Time It's For Real! Also: Steiners, Yankem-Undertaker, Bodies-Cornette, Arn Anderson.
Nov. 1996: Brian Pillman: Next WWF Champ! Also: Giant-Sting, Ray Stevens, Dick Murdoch, Cloudy, John Tenta, WCW shuffle.
Jan. 1997: It Could Happen! Hogan's Next Move ... Buy WCW! Also: Undertaker, New Jack, Owen-Bulldog, Ted DiBiase.
Feb. 1997: Wrestling's Top Stars: What 1997 Has In Store For Them! Also: Michaels-Hart, Pit Bull I, Rey Mysterio Jr., Kevin Nash.
May 1997: Hogan's Headache: The Pain Is Piper! And The Remedy Is Revenge! Also: Michaels-Hart, Guerreros, J.C. Ice, gang violence, Marc Mero.
Nov. 1997: 10-Year Grudge! Lex Luger's Career Ruined By J.J. Dillon? Also: Shawn-Bret, Jeff Jarrett, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, Dreamer-Raven, Dan Severn.

Hol. 1997: First Owen ... Then 'Taker ... Then Hogan: Who's Gonna Go Next? Also: Steve Austin, Bret Hart, Lex Luger, Ric Flair, Dean Malenko.

March 1998 (Special Issue): 1997—The Year In Pictures. Also: The Road Warruiors, Rey Mysterio Jr., Undertaker, The Giant.

April 1998: "We've Won!" Maybe ... But Can The NWO Handle Its Own Success? Also: Ken Shamrock, Steiners-Warriors, Douglas & Francine, Rocky Maivia.

June 1998: Hollywood Hogan: 10 More Dirty Deeds ... And Then He's Outta Here! Also: DeGeneration X, Jim Cornette, Randy Savage, yesterday and today.

July 1998: Death Wish! Costing Hogan The Title Isn't Enough For The Macho Man: What's Next? Also: Ric Flair, Headbangers-Rock 'n' Rolls, Chris Chetti, Mero & Sable.

Aug. 1998: We Stand Behind Ya, Vince! It's Time To Fire Austin. Also: Luna-Sable, Randy Savage, Dean Malenko, Super 8 tourney.

Sept. 1998 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report. Also: Nash-Hogan, Rocky Maivia, Bill Goldberg, Antonio Inoki.

Oct. 1998: The Mother Of All Pay-Per-Views! A WWF-WCW Supercard Is No Longer Just Talk! Also: Sable, Undertaker, Randy Savage, Sabu & Van Dam.

Nov. 1998: Demons Be Damned! Sting Makes The Giant See Red! Also: McMahon-Dude, Jarrett-Blackman, Melanie Pillman, Rey Mysterio Jr.

Hol. 1998: "Quit, Mick!" A Desperate Plea From A Distraught Wife. Also: Chris Jericho, Jason Sensation, wrestlers vs. celebrities, hardcore war.

Jan. 1999: Stone-Cold's Personal Survivor Series. Also: Rock-HHH, NWA, Bret Hart, Howard Finkel, three-way title matches.

Feb. 1999: Hot Rocks! The Anger That Drives Shamrock & The Rock. Also: McMahon-Austin, Spike Dudley, Eric Bischoff, Perry Saturn.

April 1999: Hogan's Retirement: White House Or White Lie? Also: DDP-Hart, Taz-Douglas, Steve Austin, Mankind.

April 1999: Hogan's Retirement: White House Or White Lie? Also: DDP-Hart, Taz-Douglas, Steve Austin, Mankind.

May 1999: Team Coverage: The NWO Reunion! Also: Kane-McMahon, Dallas Page, Funk-Abdullah, WWF sideshow.

June 1999 (Special Issue): Ric Flair: The 10 Feats He Must Accomplish Before He's Through. Also: Rocky Maivia, Juventud Guerrera, Billy Gunn, body parts quiz section.

July 1999: Our Bottom Line ... It's High Time Austin Shows McMahon Respect! Also: Jerry Lawler, Rey Mysterio Jr., Ken Shamrock, DDP-Bigelow-Goldberg.

Aug. 1999: This Man Is Pure Evil! Trust Hogan And He'll Take You To Hell! Plus: Owen Hart, Vader, Sable.

Sept. 1999 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report. Also: DDP-Sting, Douglas-Credible, Big Show-McMahons, Disco Inferno, Keirn & Lane.

Oct. 1999: Shawn Michaels' Game Of Corporate Chess! Are The McMahons His Pawns? Also: Steiners, Billy Gunn, Savage & George.

Nov. 1999: Austin's New Powers: Shag Vince? Yeah, Baby! Also: Arn-Sid, Hardy Boys, Ernest Miller, Naoya Ogawa.

Hol. 1999: Before The WWF Can Sell ... Read What They Had To Tell! Also: Kanyon, Big Show, Spike & Mahoney-Axl & New Jack, Kevin Nash.

Feb. 2000: When Will Mankind Finally Tell The Rock ... "Put A Sock In It"? Also: Goldberg, Chris Jericho, Sabu, Harlem Heat.

March 2000 (Special Issue): 1999—The Year In Pictures. Also: Triple-H, Luger-Liz, Sabu-Van Dam, Bob Holly.

April 2000: Can The WWF Survive Without Steve Austin? Also: Dawn Marie-Francine, Meng, Big Show, Madusa.

May 2000: StePHONY: The Most Mistrusted McMahon Of All! Also: Harlem Heat & Midnight, David & Ric Flair, Kurt Angle, Rhino.

June 2000 (Special Issue): The Rock: No. 1 On The Jabroni Hit List! Also: Awesome-Van Dam, Kurt Angle, Vampiro, federation jumpers, book of lists.

July 2000: Tori/Torrie, What's The Story? How They Rank In 10 Crucial Categories. Also: Big Show, Tank Abbott, Too Cool, Rhodes-Dreamer, Jeff Jarrett.

Aug. 2000: We're Con-Vinced! This Attack Saved The WWF! Also: Lex Luger, Radicals, Sandman & Rhino, Cyrus.

Sept. 2000 (Special Issue): WWF Mid-Year Report. Also: Mike Awesome, Nova & Chetti, Paul Wight, Chyna, Dr. Sam Sheppard.

Oct. 2000: Is Chyna Robbing Eddie Of His Latino Heat? Also: Abbott-Steiner, Scotty Too Hotty, Rob Van Dam, David Flair.

Nov. 2000: Special Fear Issue—Rock-Benoit, Ric Flair, HBK. Also: ECW mid-year report, Bill Goldberg.

Dec. 2000 (Special Issue): WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff! Also: Goldberg-Triple-H, Daffney, Christian & Edge, Jeff Peterson.

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Jan. 2001: WWF Brat-titude! Does Steph Always Get Her Way? Not On Your Life! Also: Lance Storm, Mick Foley, Goldberg, Steve Corino, Steve Blackman, Torrie Wilson.

March 2001: Triple-H & The Rock: 10 Reasons They Should Trust Each Other ... 10 Reasons They Should Not! Also: Scott Steiner, Chris Candido, Rob Van Dam, McMahon-ECW, Steven Richards, WCW factions.

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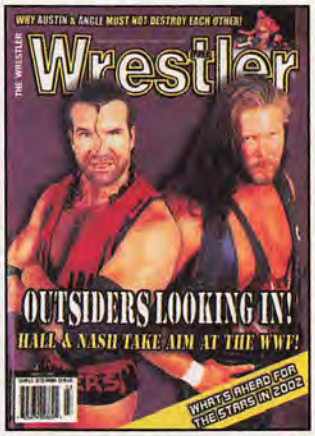
March 2002: Outsiders Looking In! Hall & Nash Take Aim At The WWF! Also: Ivory, Austin-Angle, Christian-Edge, what's ahead in '02.



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Nov. 2002: Who's Next? The Stars That Could Replace Stone-Cold. Also: Torrie Wilson, Davey Boy Smith, Ken Shamrock, Funk-Abdullah-Rhodes-Sullivan, WWE shockers, indy roulette.

Jan. 2003: War Games! WWE Is Out Of Control ... And Vinnie Mac Loves It! Also: Rey Mysterio Jr., AJ Styles, Rikishi-Gangrel, The Rock, Christian.

March 2003: The WrestleMania XIX We Want To See! Also: Terry Funk, Rey Mysterio Jr., Nidia, NWA-TNA, what's ahead in '03.

May 2003: A Permanent Replacement For The Rock? Book It! Also: Smackdown, Joanie & Syxx-Pac, Raw report cards, Shawn Michaels, Victoria.

July 2003: In Tune With Steve Austin—A Comprehensive Guide To Stone-Cold's Red-Hot Comeback. Also: Kurt Angle, Amazing Red, The Sheik, Bill DeMott, Al Snow, Ric Flair.

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March 2004: McMahon vs. McWoman: How Vince vs. Stephanie Nearly Ruined WWE! Also: Flair & Dusty, Eric Angle, Jeff Jarrett, Shannon Moore, what's ahead in '04.

July 2004: Stop Right There! RVD Won't Let The Young Studs Pass Him By! Also: Jonny Fairplay, Walters-Xavier, HHH-HBK.

Oct. 2004: Austin, Lesnar, Goldberg: We Know Who'll Be Back First. Also: AJ. Styles, Eugene, Rene Dupree, mid-year report.

Jan. 2005: Evolving Beyond Evolution: It's Time For Randy Orton To Be A Man! Also: Rey Mysterio Jr., Kane-Lita, Ron Killings, La Resistance, Eugene-Helmsley, Trish-Victoria, Kurt Angle, WWE mid-carders.

April 2005: PPV Revolution: How Taboo Tuesday & Victory Road Changed Wrestling Forever. Also: Eddie Guerrero, Jushin Liger, Edge-Benoit, Kane-Snitsky, TNA vs. ROH, Heyman & Heidenreich, Charlie Haas, WWE pink slips.

June 2005: Chokehold On America: Have Hassan & Daivari Put Us In A No-Win Situation? Also: Sabu, Edge, Shelton Benjamin, ECW, report cards.

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PWI OFFICIAL RATINGS

FOR PERIOD ENDED MAY 25, 2011

TOP 10

1. **JOHN CENA**
   240, West Newbury, MA
   (4) WWE heavyweight champion
2. **STING**
   255, Venice Beach, CA
   (2) TNA World champion
3. **RANDY ORTON**
   245, St. Louis, MO
   (-) WWE World champion
4. **ULTIMO GUERRERO**
   210, Gomez Palacio, Mex.
   (3) CMLL champion
5. **HIROSHI TANAHASHI**
   230, Ogaki, Japan
   (5) IWGP heavyweight champion
6. **THE SHEIK**
   242, Damascus, Syria
   (-) NWA heavyweight champion
7. **EDDIE EDWARDS**
   214, Boston, MA
   (8) Ring of Honor heavyweight champion
8. **EL ZORRO**
   200, Sevilla, Spain
   (9) AAA champion
9. **CHRISTIAN**
   240, Toronto, ON
   (-) No. 1 contender WWE World title
10. **CHRISTOPHER DANIELS**
    237, Los Angeles, CA
    (10) No. 1 contender ROH title

Randy Orton

TAG TEAMS

1. **ROBERT ROODE & JAMES STORM**
   Combined weight: 470 pounds
   (1) TNA World tag team champions
2. **CHARLIE HAAS & SHELTON BENJAMIN**
   Combined weight: 497 pounds
   (2) ROH tag team champions
3. **DAVID OTUNGA & MICHAEL McGILLICUTTY**
   Combined weight: 474 pounds
   (-) WWE tag team champions
4. **CHRIS HERO & CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI**
   Combined weight: 475 pounds
   (5) No. 1 contenders ROH tag team title
5. **BIG E LANGSTON & CALVIN RAINES**
   Combined weight: 549 pounds
   (-) FCW tag team champions
6. **JON DAVIS & KORY CHAVIS**
   Combined weight: 449 pounds
   (8) NWA tag team champions
7. **MASATO YOSHINO & PAC**
   Combined weight: 331 pounds
   (3) DGUSA Open the United Gate champions
8. **JOE DOERING & KONO**
   Combined weight: 526 pounds
   (7) AJPW Unified tag team champions
9. **A.J. STEELE & MURDER-ONE**
   Combined weight: 507 pounds
   (-) No. 1 contenders NWA tag team title
10. **JESSE NEAL & SHANNON MOORE**
    Combined weight: 433 pounds
    (10) No. 1 contenders TNA World tag team title

RAW

WWE Champion:
JOHN CENA
(1) 240, West Newberry, MA

1—**THE MIZ** *(C) 231, Cleveland, OH*
2—**ALBERTO DEL RIO** *(-) 240, San Luis Potosi, Mexico*
3—**KOFI KINGSTON** *(-) 221, Ghana, West Africa*
4—**CM PUNK** *(4) 222, Chicago, IL*
5—**DOLPH ZIGGLER** *(5) 221, Hollywood, CA*
6—**JOHN MORRISON** *(6) 223, Los Angeles, CA*
7—**R-TRUTH** *(10) 235, Charlotte, NC*
8—**THE BIG SHOW** *(-) 485, Tampa, FL*
9—**REY MYSTERIO JR.** *(-) 175, San Diego, CA*
10—**TYLER REKS** *(-) 252, Parts Unknown*

SMACKDOWN

World Champion:
RANDY ORTON
(-) 245, St. Louis, MO

1—**CHRISTIAN** *(2) 240, Toronto, ON*
2—**WADE BARRETT** *(7) 265, Manchester, England*
3—**SHEAMUS** *(-) 280, Dublin, Ireland*
4—**CODY RHODES** *(3) 223, Marietta, GA*
5—**KANE** *(8) 323, Hell*
6—**DANIEL BRYAN** *(-) 190, Aberdeen, WA*
7—**SIN CARA** *(-) 196, Mexico City, Mexico*
8—**DREW McINTYRE** *(10) 252, Ayr, Scotland*
9—**MARK HENRY** *(-) 392, Silsbee, TX*
10—**TED DIBIASE JR.** *(-) 235, West Palm Beach, FL*

TNA

World Champion:
STING
(C) 255, Venice Beach, CA

1—**ROB VAN DAM** *(2) 237, Los Angeles, CA*
2—**MR. ANDERSON** *(1) 243, Green Bay, WI*
3—**KURT ANGLE** *(3) 240, Pittsburgh, PA*
4—**JEFF JARRETT** *(4) 235, Nashville, TN*
5—**MATT MORGAN** *(5) 310, Fairfield, CT*
6—**ABYSS** *(-) 350, Parts Unknown*
7—**HERNANDEZ** *(7) 280, Houston, TX*
8—**SAMOA JOE** *(8) 280, Los Angeles, CA*
9—**AJ STYLES** *(-) 215, Gainesville, GA*
10—**BULLY RAY** *(-) 296, Hell's Kitchen, NY*

RING OF HONOR

Champion:
EDDIE EDWARDS
(C) 214, Boston, MA

1—**CHRISTOPHER DANIELS** *(1) 224, Los Angeles, CA*
2—**DAVEY RICHARDS** *(2) 205, Othello, WA*
3—**RODERICK STRONG** *(3) 215, Tampa, FL*
4—**EL GENERICO** *(4) 180, Tijuana, Mexico*
5—**JAY BRISCOE** *(5) 215, Laurel, DE*
6—**HOMICIDE** *(6) 205, Brooklyn, NY*
7—**CHRIS HERO** *(7) 225, Metropolis*
8—**MARK BRISCO** *(8) 215, Laurel, DE*
9—**CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI** *(9) 265, Lucerne, Switzerland*
10—**MIKE BENNETT** *(10) 225, Carver, MA*

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (–) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue, while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

ARENACHICKS: Champion—Vacant; **1**—Angel Orsini; **2**—Jazz; **3**—Sassy Stephie; **4**—Kellie Skater; **5**—Allison Danger; **6**—Sara Del Rey; **7**—Christie Ricci; **8**—April Hunter; **9**—Jessicka Havok; **10** Mia Svenson.

DRAGON GATE USA: Champion—YAMATO; **1**—Masato Yoshino; **2**—Austin Aries; **3**—Akira Tozawa; **4**—BxB Hulk; **5**—Naruki Doi; **6**—Brodie Lee; **7**—CIMA; **8**—Ricochet; **9**—PAC; **10**—Chuck Taylor.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Papadon; **1**—Chris Wylde; **2**—Glen Osbourne; **3**—Aden Chambers; **4**—Scott Wright; **5**—Travis Blake; **6**—Bazooka Joe; **7**—Kid America; **8**—Jason Leigh; **9**—Courageous Cruz; **10**—Ahtu.

EVOLVE: Champion—Vacant; **1**—Jimmy Jacobs; **2**—Johnny Gargano; **3**—Chuck Taylor; **4**—Drake Younger; **5**—Ricochet; **6**—Munenori Sawa; **7**—Sami Callihan; **8**—Chris Lee; **9**—Claudio Castagnoli; **10**—Homicide.

NWA TOP ROPE: Champion—Vacant, **1**—Arrick Andrews; **2**—Hammer Jack; **3**—Big Bully Douglas; **4**—Ox Harley; **5**—Psycho; **6**—Pappy; **7**—Lee Condrey; **8**—Lee Cross; **9**—Jared Crowe; **10**—Anthony Wayne.

PLATINUM CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Shane Marx; **1**—Vordell Walker; **2**—Lee Roy; **3**—The Vandal; **4**—Mason; **5**—Grotesque; **6**—The Phantom; **7**—Chip Day; **8**—Thomas Johnson; **9**—Curry Kid; **10**—Davey Richards.

PWF NORTHEAST: Champion—Brandon Locke; **1**—Mike Bennett; **2**—Johnny Hayes; **3**—Ryan Bisbal; **4**—Triplelicious; **5**—Jason Blade; **6**—Dave Cole; **7**—Kristian Frost; **8**—John Poe; **9**—Vinny Marseglia; **10**—Branden Michael Thomas.

TENNESSEE XTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Bob O Mac; **1**—Nick Taylor; **2**—Bobby Blassie; **3**—Allen Shepard; **4**—Funkmaster V; **5**—Bobby Rayne; **6**—Shane Daniels; **7**—Tsunami Kid; **8**—J-Mac; **9**—Demetria; **10**—Maskerade.

TEXAS ELITE WRESTLING: Champion—Maxx Lavaro; **1**—Colton Shane; **2**—Sean Cordova; **3**—Chris Preston; **4**—Hunter Dude Preston; **5**—Jason Skyy; **6**—Mongoose; **7**—Court Caution; **8**—Michael Cross; **9**—Assault; **10**—Cory Summers.

TRI-STATE WRESTLING ALIANCE: Champion—Breaker Morant; **1**—Bobby Shields; **2**—Josh Daniels; **3**—Shockwave the Robot; **4**—Tony Stetson; **5**—Matt Saigon; **6**—Blue Meanie; **7**—Chris Wylde; **8**—Damian Dragon; **9**—Cujo the Hellhound; **10**—Kid America.

WOMEN SUPERSTARS UNCENSORED: Champion—Mercedes Martinez; **1**—Brittney Savage; **2**—Jessicka Havok; **3**—Alicia; **4**—Nikki Roxx; **5**—Serena; **6**—Jazz; **7**—Sassy Stephanie; **8**—Rain; **9**—Kristin Astara; **10**—Jamilia Craft.

WORLD ALL-PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Vacant; **1**—Magic; **2**—Kuvatro; **3**—Spanish Fly; **4**—Big Vito; **5**—J. Lover; **6**—Damien Darling; **7**—Biggie Biggs; **8**—Rasta Imposta; **9**—Johnny Mangue; **10**—Low Life Louie.

NWA

Champion:
THE SHEIK
(1) 242, Damascus, Syria

1—COLT CABANA
(C) 233, Chicago, IL
2—CHANCE PROPHET
(2) 225, Sacramento, CA
3—ADAM PEARCE
(3) 248, San Diego, CA
4—JOEY RYAN
(4) 210, Los Angeles, CA
5—DAMIEN WAYNE
(5) 237, Hampton, VA
6—AUSTIN ARIES
(6) 202, Milwaukee, WI
7—ANTONIO THOMAS
(7) 235, Panama City, FL
8—OLIVER JOHN
(8) 228, Sacramento, CA
9—ACE ROCKWELL
(9) 212, Atlanta, GA
10—BLUE DEMON JR.
(10) 194, Mexico City, Mexico

JAPAN

1—HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(1) 230, Ogaki, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion
2—TAKASHI SUGIURA
(2) 220, Nagoya, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
3—SUWAMA
(3) 260, Kanagawa, Japan
AJPW Triple Crown champion
4—YUJI NAGATA
(4) 238, Chiba, Japan
5—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI
(5) 190, Saitama, Japan
6—GO SHIOZAKI
(6) 240, Kumamoto, Japan
7—HIROOKI GOTO
(–) 227, Kuwana, Japan
8—SUZUKI KOTARO
(8) 180, Warabi, Japan
9—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA
(–) 245, Mineyama, Japan
10—MVP
(–) 259, Miami, FL

MEXICO

1—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(1) 210, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
CMLL champion
2—EL ZORRO
(2) 200, Sevilla, Spain
AAA champion
3—JUSHIN LIGER
(3) 210, Hiroshima, Japan
4—LA PARKA
(4) 220, Hermosillo, Mexico
5—NEGRO CASAS
(5) 170, Mexico City, Mexico
6—DR. WAGNER JR.
(6) 216, Torreon, Mexico
7—VOLADOR JR.
(7) 190, Monclova, Mexico
8—LA SOMBRA
(8) 180, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
9—AVERNO
(9) 170, Mexico City, Mexico
10—CHESSMAN
(10) 230, Villa Nicolas Romero, Mexico

WOMEN

1—MICKIE JAMES
(9) 128, Richmond, VA
TNA Knockouts champion
2—MADISON EAGLES
(3) 160, Sydney, Australia
3—MERCEDES MARTINEZ
(2) 147, Waterbury, CT
4—BRIE BELLA
(–) 125, Scottsdale, AZ
WWE Divas champion
5—BRITTANY FORCE
(6) 130, Johnstown, PA
6—MELISSA ANDERSON
(4) 142, San Francisco, CA
7—SASSY STEPHIE
(–) 122, Akron, OH
8—TAHA SIMONE
(7) 156, Dallas, TX
9—JESSICKA HAVOK
(10) 175, Canton, OH
10—MELANIE CRUISE
(–) 170, Chicago, IL

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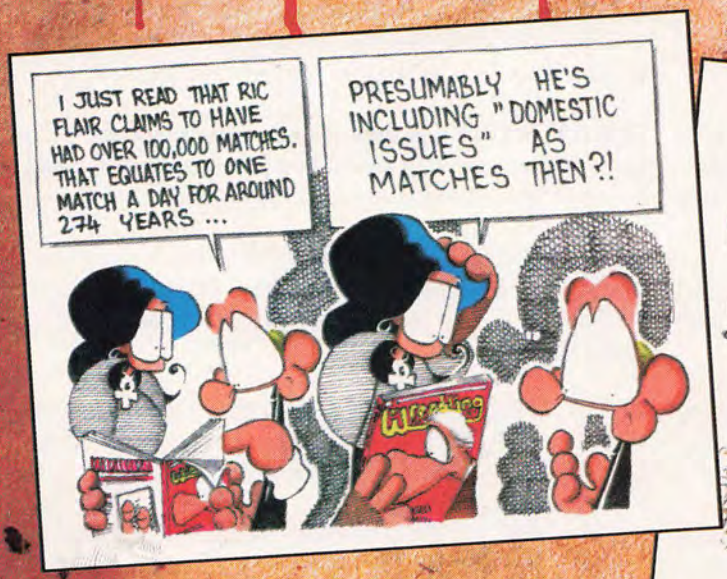

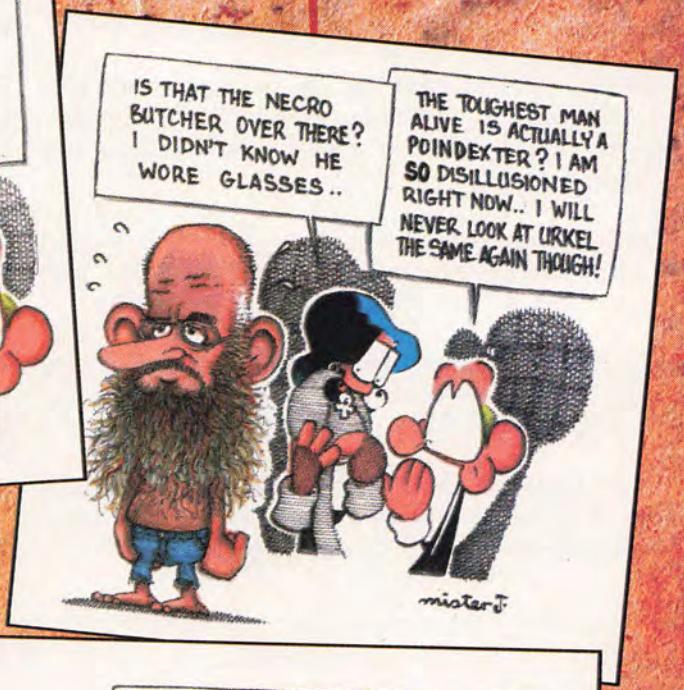

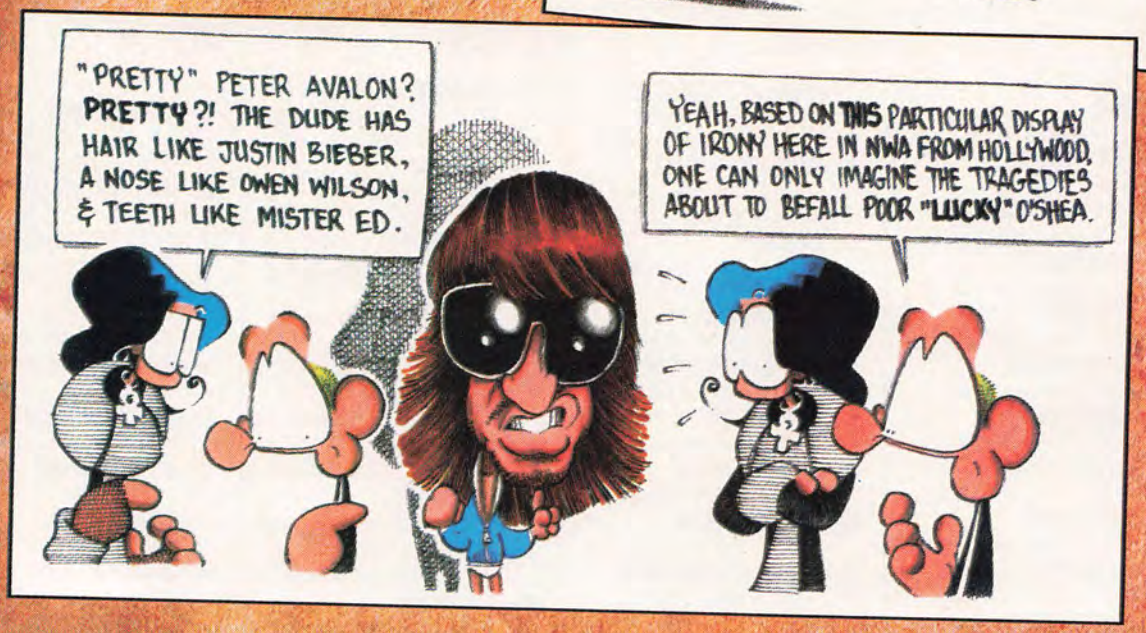

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